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"*The greatest of novelists . . . he has no peer yet in the English tongue.*"—Rev. Dr. Cyrus A. Barton.

Honoré de Balzac

THE HOUSEHOLD EDITION

"*He was more than moral . . . he was religious.*"—Rev. Dr. A. H. Tuttle.

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OLYMPE MICHAUD

When the countess and her two guests reached the end of one of the winding paths leading to the gate-house, they saw Madame Michaud sitting just outside the door, working on a layette. In that attitude, thus occupied, the woman added to the landscape an element of human interest which gave it the finishing-touch.

Household Edition

THE PEASANTS

BY

Honoré de Balzac

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THE PEASANTS

TO MONSIEUR P.-S.-B. GAVAULT

J.-J. Rousseau wrote at the head of *La Nouvelle Héloïse:* "I have seen the manners of my time and have published these letters." May not I say to you, in imitation of that great writer: "I study the progress of my age, and I publish this work"?

The purpose of this study, terrifying in its truthfulness, so long as society shall choose to make of philanthropy a principle instead of taking it for an accident, is to place in relief the principal figures of a class of people neglected by so many pens in pursuit of new subjects. That neglect is nothing more than prudence, perhaps, at a time when the common people inherit from all the courtiers of royalty. Poetic sentiment has been lavished upon criminals, our pity has overflowed upon executioners, we have almost deified the proletariat! The sects are in commotion, and crying with all their pens: "Arise, workers!" as in the old days they said to the Third Estate: "Arise!" It is plain that not one of these Erostratuses has had the courage to go into the heart of the country districts to study the permanent conspiracy of those whom we still call the weak, against

those who deem themselves strong, of the peasant against the rich man. The important thing is to enlighten, not the legislator of to-day, but the legislator of to-morrow. Amid the democratic vertigo to which so many blind writers succumb, is it not high time to describe at last the peasant who makes the Code inapplicable by reducing property to the condition of something that is and that is not? You are about to see that indefatigable sapper, that rodent who subdivides and parcels out the land and cuts an acre into a hundred bits, always invited to the banquet by a petty bourgeoisie which makes of him its auxiliary and its prey at once. This anti-social element created by the Revolution will some day absorb the bourgeoisie, as the bourgeoisie has devoured the nobility. Rising above the law by virtue of its own pettiness, this Robespierre with one head and twenty million arms works incessantly, squatted in all the communes, enthroned in the Municipal Council, provided with weapons and enrolled in the National Guard in all the cantons of France by the Revolution of 1830, which did not remember that Napoléon preferred the chances of disaster to the arming of the masses.

If I have, during the last eight years, laid aside a hundred times and a hundred times resumed this book, the most considerable of those I have resolved to write, surely all my friends, like yourself, have realized that courage might waver in face of so many difficulties, so many details as are involved in this doubly terrible and cruelly sanguinary drama;

but among the motives which make me almost foolhardy to-day, must be reckoned the desire to complete a work destined to afford you a proof of my earnest and lasting gratitude for a devoted friendship which was one of my greatest consolations in misfortune.

DE BALZAC.

PART FIRST

HE WHO HAS LAND, HAS WAR

(*Qui terre a, guerre a*)

I

THE CHATEAU

TO MONSIEUR NATHAN

"Aigues, August 6, 1823.

"I propose, my dear Nathan, to set you a-dreaming with the true, you, who provide the public with such delightful dreams by your fanciful conceits. You shall tell me if the present century can ever bequeath such dreams to the Nathans and Blondets of the year 1923! You shall measure the distance that lies between us and the time when the Florines of the eighteenth century found, upon awaking, a château like this of Aigues in their contract.

"My dear fellow, if you receive my letter in the morning, fancy yourself, as you lie in bed, about fifty leagues from Paris, on the outskirts of Bourgogne, on a broad, royal road, and imagine two small gate-houses, connected or separated by a gate, painted green!—There it was that the diligence set down your friend.

"On each side of this double gate-house winds a quickset hedge, from which bramble-bushes protrude like straggling hairs. Here and there a clump

of trees insolently raises its head. On the sloping bank of the ditch, lovely flowers bathe their feet in a sluggish, slime-coated stream. To right and left the hedge runs to the verge of a wood, and the double field which it encloses has been obtained, doubtless, by persistent grubbing and clearing.

"At those deserted, dust-covered gate-houses begins a magnificent avenue of centenary elms, whose umbrella-like heads bend toward one another and form a long, majestic bower. The grass is growing in the avenue; one can hardly detect there the double ruts made by carriage wheels. The age of the elms, the width of the two cross alleys, the venerable aspect of the lodges, the dark hue of the stone courses, all suggest the approaches to a quasi-royal château.

"Before reaching the gate, from the summit of an eminence which we Frenchmen vaingloriously style a mountain, and at whose foot lies the village of Conches, the last posting station, I had noticed the long valley of Aigues, at the end of which the high-road turns aside to the petty sub-prefecture of Ville-aux-Fayes, where the nephew of our friend Des Lupeaulx reigns. Vast forests, lying along the horizon on an extensive hillside skirted by a small river, overlook that fertile valley, framed by the distant peaks of a lesser Switzerland called the Morvan. Those dense forests belong to Aigues, to the Marquis de Ronquerolles and to the Comte de Soulanges, whose châteaux, parks, and villages, viewed from a

distance and from an elevation, give an air of probability to the fantastic landscapes of Breughel de Velours.

"If these details do not bring to your mind all the castles in Spain you have longed to possess in France, you are not worthy of this narrative from the pen of an awe-struck Parisian. In a word, I have found much enjoyment in a region where art and nature are mingled without either being spoiled by the other, where art seems natural, where nature is artistic. I have discovered the oasis we have so often dreamed of as the result of reading certain novels: luxuriant, gayly-decked nature, irregularity without confusion, a touch of savagery and disorder, something unfamiliar and out of the common. Climb over the gate and let us go on.

"When my inquisitive eyes sought to inspect the avenue, which the sun reaches only at his rising and setting, casting streaks of light across it with his oblique rays, my vision was obstructed by a bit of rising ground; but, after passing around it, the avenue is intersected by a small patch of woodland, and we are at a sort of cross-roads, in the centre of which rises a stone obelisk, precisely like an everlasting exclamation point. Between the courses of this monument, which is surmounted by a prickly ball—what an idea!—some few flowers grow, purple or yellow according to the season. Certainly, Aigues was built by a woman or for a woman; no man has such coquettish ideas; the architect must have had his instructions.

"Having passed through this wood, which stands as a sort of sentinel, I found myself in a lovely hollow, at the bottom of which flows a bubbling stream crossed by an arch of moss-covered stones of a superb color, the loveliest of the mosaics undertaken by time. The avenue follows the course of the stream, rising gently. In the distance, the first tableau comes in sight: a mill and its dam, its embankment and its trees, its ducks, its linen spread on the grass, its thatch-covered house, its nets, and its fishing-boat, to say nothing of a miller's apprentice who was already taking my measure. Wherever you may be in the country, and when you imagine that you are alone, you are the target for two eyes shaded by a cotton nightcap, a laborer drops his hoe, a vine-dresser straightens his bent back, a small girl who tends goats or cows or sheep climbs into a willow to spy upon you.

"Soon the avenue narrows to a path between two rows of acacias leading to an iron gate of the time when iron-workers affected airy filigree work not unlike the scrolls in the copy of a writing-master. On each side of the gateway is a ha-ha fence, whose double crest is thickly studded with lance-heads and darts of most threatening aspect, veritable iron hedgehogs. The gate stands between two porter's lodges like those at the palace of Versailles, and crowned by urns of colossal proportions. The gold of the arabesques has turned red, rust has mingled its tinge therewith; but the gate, which is called the Gate of the Avenue, and which recalls the

hand of the Grand Dauphin, to whom Aigues is indebted for it, seemed to me the more beautiful on that account. At the end of each ha-ha begins a wall, not rough-cast, where the stones, set in mortar made of reddish clay, display their manifold shades of color: the bright yellow of the flint, the white of the limestone, the reddish-brown of the millstone, and the most capricious shapes. At first sight, the park seems gloomy, its walls are hidden by climbing plants, by trees which have not heard the sound of an axe for fifty years. You would say that it was a forest which had reverted to the virgin state by virtue of a phenomenon reserved exclusively for forests. The trunks are enveloped by creepers that extend from one to another. Mistletoes with shiny green leaves hang from all the forks of the branches, where the slightest dampness can exist. I have found once more the giant ivies, the wild arabesques which flourish only at a distance of fifty leagues from Paris, where earth is not so expensive that it must be used sparingly. The landscape, to be thus treated, needs plenty of soil. Here, nothing is trimmed, the rake is unknown, the ruts are full of water and the frog tranquilly brings forth her tadpoles therein; the fairest forest-flowers grow in abundance, and the heather is as beautiful as that I saw in January on your mantel, in the fancy flower-pot contributed by Florine. The mystery intoxicates one, it inspires vague longings. The odors of the forest, odors adored by the dainty poetic souls who delight in the most innocent mosses, the most

poisonous cryptogams, damp fields, willows, balsams, the wild thyme, the stagnant waters of a pool, the star-shaped yellow flower of the water-lily: all the vigorous exhalations of the incessant fecundation assailed my nostrils, all giving me a thought, their soul perhaps. I thought of a pink dress floating along that winding path.

"The path ends abruptly with a final clump of birches, aspens, and all the trembling trees, an intelligent family, with graceful stalks, and of refined bearing, the trees of free love! From that point, my dear fellow, I saw a pond covered with nymphæas, plants with great spreading leaves or small slender ones; and on the pond a black and white boat lay rotting, dainty as the skiff of a Seine boatman, light as a walnut-shell. Beyond the pond stands a château, built in 1560, of dark-red brick, with courses of stone at the corners and the windows, which still have small diamond panes—O Versailles! The stone is hewn in diamond-shaped points, but hollowed out, as on the façade facing the Bridge of Sighs of the ducal palace at Venice. There is no regularity about the château except the central building, from which descends a vainglorious stoop with a double-winding staircase, with swelling balusters, slender at the foot and with flattened calves. This main building is flanked by turrets with little steeples on which are flower designs in lead, and by modern wings with galleries and urns, more or less Grecian in design. In the latter, my dear fellow, there is no symmetry whatever. Those nests, put together at

random, are wrapped, so to speak, in a few evergreen trees, whose branches shake their myriads of brown needles upon the roofs, keeping the mosses alive and imparting animation to the gaping crevices which afford pleasure to the eye. There is the Italian pine with its red bark and its majestic umbrella-like top; there is a cedar two hundred years old, weeping-willows, a fir from the North, a beech that overtops it, and, in front of the principal turret, a collection of most unfamiliar shrubs: a trimmed yew that reminds one of some old ruined French garden, magnolias, and hortensias at their feet; in short, it is the *Invalides* of the heroes of horticulture, who have their turn at being fashionable, and are then forgotten like all heroes.

"A chimney, with carved work of original design, which was pouring forth great clouds of smoke at one corner of the structure, assured me that the delicious spectacle was not merely the stage-setting of an opera. The kitchen revealed the existence of living beings. Can you imagine me, Blondet, who fancy myself in the polar regions when I am at Saint-Cloud, in the midst of this ardent Burgundian landscape? The sun pours down his most intense heat, the kingfisher is on the edge of the pond, the grasshoppers sing, the cricket chirps, the pods of some plants burst, the poppies exhale their morphine in cloying tears, everything stands out in sharp relief against the deep blue of the sky. Above the reddish soil of the terrace float the exhilarating fumes of that natural punch which intoxicates insects and

flowers, which burns our eyes and tans our faces. The grapes are ripening, the vine-branches display a veil of white threads whose delicate tracery would put the finest laces to shame. And along the house wall the blue larkspur blooms, the yellow nasturtium and the sweet-pea. Tuberoses and orange-trees in the distance fill the air with perfume. After the poetic exhalation of the woods, which had prepared me for them, came the piquant pastilles of this botanic seraglio.

"And see, last of all, at the top of the steps, like the queen of the flowers, a woman in white, bareheaded, under an umbrella lined with white silk, but whiter than the silk, whiter than the lilies at her feet, whiter than the starry jasmine that peers boldly between the balustrades—a Frenchwoman born in Russia, who said to me: 'I had given you up!' She had seen me at the turn in the avenue. How perfectly all women, even the most ingenuous, understand the importance of the stage-setting! The clatter made by servants preparing to serve breakfast told me that that meal had been delayed to await the arrival of the diligence. She had not dared to come to meet me.

"Is not this what we have dreamed of, is it not the dream of all lovers of the beautiful in all its forms, of the seraphic beauty exhibited by Luini in the *Marriage of the Virgin*, his lovely fresco at Sarono, of the beauty that Rubens conceived for his *Battle of the Thermodon*, of the beauty that five centuries have been perfecting in the cathedrals of

Seville and Milan, of the beauty of the Saracens at Granada, of the beauty of Louis XIV. at Versailles, of the beauty of the Alps and the beauty of Limagne?

"This estate, which is neither too princely nor too suggestive of mere vulgar wealth, although both a prince and a farmer-general have lived here,—which fact will serve to account for it,—includes two thousand hectares of woodland, a park of nine hundred acres, the mill, three farms, an immense farm at Conches, and vineyards, which should yield a revenue of something like seventy-two thousand francs. Such is Aigues, my dear fellow, where I have been expected for two years, and where I am at this moment, in the *Persian chamber* set aside for the dear friends of the family.

"From the upper part of the park, toward Conches, flow a dozen clear, limpid streams, coming originally from the Morvan, all of which empty into the pond after embellishing with their liquid ribbons the valley of the park and its magnificent gardens. The name of Aigues is derived from these fascinating rivulets. The word *Vives* has been suppressed, for in old times the estate was called Aigues-Vives, to distinguish it from Aigues-Mortes. The pond discharges into the stream along which the avenue runs, through a broad, straight canal, lined by weeping-willows throughout its length. Thus embellished the canal produces a delightful effect. As you float along, sitting on the thwart of the boat, you imagine that you are in the nave

of a vast cathedral, the choir being represented by the château buildings at the end of the canal. If the setting sun casts its orange-colored rays, intersected by bands of shadow, upon the château, and lights up the windows, it seems to you that you are looking at brilliant stained glass. At the end of the canal can be seen Blangy, the chief town of the commune, containing about sixty houses, with a village church, that is to say, a building in bad repair, provided with a wooden bell-tower that supports a roof of broken tiles. Among the houses are a parsonage and the residence of a bourgeois. The commune is of considerable size, however; it comprises two hundred other scattered houses, of which this village forms the headquarters. The commune is, in some places, cut up into small gardens; the roads are marked by fruit-trees. The gardens, like genuine peasants' gardens, contain a little of everything: flowers, onions, cabbages, vines, currants, and an abundance of manure. The village seems a primitive place; it is rustic; it has that bedizened simplicity which so many artists seek to paint. Lastly, in the distance, you can see the little village of Soulanges, perched on the edge of a vast pond like a factory in the Lake of Thun.

"When you are walking in the park, which has four gates, each of a superb pattern, the Arcadia of mythology seems to you as dull and tame as Beauce. Arcadia is in Bourgogne and not in Greece, Arcadia is at Aigues and nowhere else. A river, formed by divers small streams, flows through the lower part of

the park in a serpentine course, and imparts to it a cool tranquillity, an air of solitude which is the more reminiscent of the Chartreuse convents, in that there actually is, upon an artificial island, a summer-house—*chartreuse*—in the last stages of decay, whose interior splendor is worthy of the voluptuous financier who built it. Aigues, my dear fellow, belonged to that Bouret who spent two millions to receive Louis XV. for one visit. How many headstrong passions, talented minds, fortunate circumstances, must have combined to create this beautiful spot! A mistress of Henri IV. rebuilt the château where it now is, and added the forest. The favorite of the Grand Dauphin, Mademoiselle Choin, to whom Aigues was given, increased the size of the estate by a few farms. Bouret furnished the château with all the refined taste of the *petites maisons* of Paris, for a celebrity of the Opéra. Aigues is indebted to Bouret for the restoration of the ground-floor in the style of Louis XV.

"I was speechless with admiration of the dining-room. The eyes are attracted first of all by a frescoed ceiling in the Italian style, in which the most fantastic arabesques are intertwined. At intervals, female figures in stucco, ending in foliage, hold up baskets of flowers, which join the branches in the ceiling. In the panels between the women are admirable paintings, the work of unknown artists, representing the glories of the table: salmon, boars' heads, shell-fish; in short, the whole world of eatables, which, by curious points of resemblance,

remind one of men, women, and children, and which rival the most whimsical conceptions of China, the country where, in my opinion, the art of decoration is best understood. The mistress of the house has under her foot a spring connected with a bell, so that she can summon the servants when she wants them, without interrupting an interview or disturbing a pose. The spaces over the doors represent voluptuous scenes. All the window recesses are in marble mosaics. The room is heated from below. From every window there is a delightful view.

"The dining-room adjoins a bath-room on one side, and on the other a boudoir which opens into a salon. The walls of the bath-room are of Sèvres brick, painted to represent cameos, the floor is inlaid, the bath-tub of marble. An alcove, hidden by a picture painted on copper, which is raised by means of a cord and weight, contains a gilded wooden bed of a most decidedly Pompadour style. The ceiling is of lapis-lazuli, starred with gold. The cameos are after Boucher's designs. Thus the bath, the table, and love are united.

"Next the salon, which, my dear fellow, presents all the magnificence of the Louis XIV. style, comes a superb billiard-room, which has not its rival in Paris within my knowledge. The first room on this ground-floor is a semicircular reception-room, with the daintiest of staircases at the back, lighted from above, and leading to the apartments, all built at different times. And yet, my dear fellow, they cut off farmer-generals' heads in 1793! *Mon Dieu!* how

could people fail to understand that the marvels of art are impossible in a country without great fortunes, without great careers assured. If the Left is absolutely determined to kill off all kings, let it at least leave us a few little princes as big as nothing at all!

"To-day, these accumulated treasures belong to a little artistic woman, who, not content with having restored them in magnificent fashion, keeps them up for love. Alleged philosophers, who are engrossed in themselves, while pretending to be devoted to the interests of humanity, call these lovely creations extravagances. They go into ecstasies before the calico-mills and the stupid inventions of modern industry, as if we were greater and happier to-day than in the days of Henry IV., Louis XIV., and Louis XVI., all of whom have left the stamp of their reigns at Aigues. What palace, what royal château, what fine dwellings, what beautiful works of art, what gold-embroidered stuffs do we leave behind us? Our grandmothers' petticoats are in great demand to cover our easy-chairs. We selfish, stingy beneficiaries raze everything to the ground and plant cabbages where the marvellous products of art once grew. Yesterday, the ploughshare passed over Persan, a magnificent domain which gave its title to one of the most opulent families of the Parliament of Paris; the hammer has demolished Montmorency, which cost one of the Italians near to Napoléon fabulous sums; and Le Val, the creation of Regnaud de Saint-Jean d'Angély; Cassan, built by a mistress of the

Prince de Conti; in all, four royal dwellings have disappeared in the valley of the Oise alone. We are preparing around Paris a second Roman Campagna for the morrow of confusion whose tempest will blow from the North upon our plaster châteaux and our pasteboard ornaments.

"See, my dear fellow, how far the habit of *padding* newspaper articles will carry one! here am I actually writing a sort of article. Can it be that the mind, like the high-road, has its ruts? I pause, for I am robbing the government, I am robbing myself, and you may be yawning. More to-morrow. I hear the second bell which announces one of those abundant breakfasts, the secret of which has long since been lost, as a general rule, I mean, in the dining-rooms of Paris.

"This is the history of my Arcadia. In 1815, there died at Aigues one of the most illustrious *impure women* of the last century, a singer, forgotten by the guillotine and by the aristocracy, by literature and finance, after being closely connected with finance, literature, and the aristocracy, and rubbing against the guillotine; forgotten like many delightful old ladies who go into the country to expiate their adored youth and replace their lost love by another, man by nature. Those women live with the flowers, with the odor of the woods, with the sky, with the effects of light and shade, with everything that sings, wriggles, blooms, and grows, birds, lizards, flowers, and grass; they know nothing about it, they do not understand it themselves, but still they love

it; they love it so fondly that they forget dukes, marshals, farmers-general, their rivalries, their insane exploits, their unbridled luxury, their diamonds and their paste, their high-heeled slippers and their rouge, for the mild enjoyments of the country.

"I have collected some valuable information, my dear fellow, concerning the old age of Mademoiselle Laguerre, for the old age of girls like Florine, Mariette, Suzanne du Val-Noble, and Tullia disturbed me from time to time, just as some child or other was disturbed to know what became of the old moons.

"In 1790, alarmed by the tendency of public affairs, Mademoiselle Laguerre took up her abode at Aigues, which had been purchased for her by Bouret, and where he had passed several seasons with her; the fate of La du Barry frightened her so that she buried her diamonds. She was at that time only fifty-three years old, and, according to her maid, one Madame Soudry, who married a gendarme and who is now called *Madame the Mayoress* as fine as you please, 'madame was more beautiful than ever.' Nature, doubtless, has its reasons, my dear fellow, for treating creatures of that sort like spoiled children; dissipation, instead of killing them, fattens, preserves, rejuvenates them; under a lymphatic exterior they have nerves that sustain their marvellous framework; they are always beautiful for the reasons that would make a virtuous woman ugly. Certainly, chance is not moral.

"Mademoiselle Laguerre lived an irreproachable life here; may one not say that she lived like a

saint, after her famous adventure? One evening, in despair over some love-affair, she fled from the Opéra in the costume of her rôle, went into the fields, and passed the night weeping by the roadside.—How love in the days of Louis XVI. has been slandered!—She was so unaccustomed to see the dawn, that she saluted it by singing one of her most beautiful airs. By her pose, no less than by her finery, she attracted the attention of the peasants, who, marvelling at her gestures, her voice, her beauty, took her for an angel and knelt all about her. Except for Voltaire, we should have had another miracle, under Bagnolet. I don't know if the good Lord will give the poor girl credit for her tardy virtue, for love is most nauseating to a woman as weary of love as an *impure* singer at the old Opéra must have been. Mademoiselle Laguerre was born in 1740, she was in her prime in 1760, when they called Monsieur de—the name has escaped my memory—*the chief clerk of war—de la guerre*—because of his liaison with her. She dropped that name, which was altogether unknown in the country, and called herself Madame des Aigues, the better to merge herself in her estate, which she found enjoyment in keeping up in extremely artistic fashion. When Bonaparte became First Consul, she finished rounding off her estate by the addition of property belonging to the Church, to the purchase of which she devoted the proceeds of the sale of her diamonds. As a young woman from the Opéra has but little experience in managing property, she abandoned the

management of her estate to an intendant, devoting her own attention solely to the park and her flowers and fruit.

"Mademoiselle being dead and buried at Blangy, the notary of Soulanges, the little village lying between Ville-aux-Fayes and Blangy, the chief place of the canton, made a very full inventory, and succeeded at last in discovering heirs-at-law of the singer, who had no idea that she had anything of the kind. Eleven families of poor farmers in the neighborhood of Amiens, who had gone to bed in coarse rags, awoke one fine morning in sheets of gold. It was necessary to sell the property. Aigues was thereupon purchased by Montcornet, who found that he had saved, during his commands in Spain and Pomerania, the amount required for the purchase,—something like eleven hundred thousand francs, the furniture being included. The fine estate was destined always to belong to the Minister of War. The general felt the influence, doubtless, of that voluptuous ground-floor, and I was telling the countess only yesterday that her marriage was to be charged to Aigues.

"My dear fellow, in order to appreciate the countess properly, you must know that the general is a violent man, high-colored, five feet nine inches tall, round as a tower, thick-necked, with a locksmith's shoulders that must fill out a cuirass nobly. Montcornet commanded the cuirassiers at the battle of Essling, which the Austrians call Gross-Aspern, and did not fall when that superb cavalry was driven

back upon the Danube. He succeeded in crossing the river astride a huge piece of wood. The cuirassiers, finding the bridge down, formed the sublime resolution, under the inspiration of Montcornet's voice, of turning about and combating the whole Austrian army, which carried away thirty-odd wagon-loads of cuirasses on the following day. The Germans invented, as a sobriquet for the cuirassiers, a word which signifies 'men of iron.'* Montcornet

* I object to notes on principle, and as this is the first one in which I have ever indulged, its historical interest will serve as my excuse; it will prove, too, that battles can best be described otherwise than by the dry definitions of technical writers, who, for the last three thousand years, have talked to us about the right and left wings and the greater or less injury inflicted on the centre, but who have not a word to say of the soldier, his heroism and his suffering. The conscientious care with which I prepared the *Scenes of Military Life* led me to visit all the battle-fields watered by the blood of Frenchmen and of foreigners: I determined, therefore, to visit the field of Wagram. When I arrived on the banks of the Danube opposite Lobau, I noticed along the shore, where fine grass was growing, undulations like the great furrows in fields of lucerne. I asked for an explanation of that peculiar disposition of the ground, supposing that it had to do with some agricultural method. "The cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard are buried there," said the peasant, who was acting as our guide; "what you see is their graves!" His words made me shudder; Prince Frederick von Schwartzenberg, who translated them, added that that peasant had guided the convoy of wagons laden with cuirasses. By one of those peculiar coincidences frequent in war, our guide had provided Napoléon's breakfast on the morning of the battle of Wagram. Although he was a poor man, he kept the double napoléon the Emperor gave him for his milk and

has the exterior of a hero of antiquity. His arms are large and muscular, his chest broad and resonant, his head is remarkable for its leonine character, his voice one of those that can order a charge in the tumult and uproar of battle; but he has nothing

his eggs. The curate of Gross-Aspern took us into the famous cemetery where French and Austrians fought, half way to their knees in blood, with a courage and persistence equally glorious on both sides. In that cemetery, after explaining to us that a marble tablet on which our whole attention was concentrated, and which bore the name of the proprietor of Gross-Aspern, who was killed on the third day, was the only recompense accorded the family, he said, with profound melancholy: "Those were the days of great suffering and the days of great promises; but these are the days of forgetfulness." The words seemed to me magnificent in their simplicity; but, upon reflection, I understood the apparent ingratitude of the House of Austria. Neither people nor kings are rich enough to reward all the instances of devotion which mighty struggles call forth. Let those who serve a cause with the thought of reward put a price on their blood and turn *condottieri* at once! They who wield either the sword or the pen for their country ought to think of nothing but *doing well*, as our fathers said, and to look upon everything, even glory, as a lucky accident.

It was when he was charging to retake the cemetery for the third time that Masséna, wounded, and borne in a cabriolet, addressed this sublime harangue to his soldiers: "How now! you infernal rascals, you have only five sous a day, I have forty millions and you let me go ahead!" Everyone knows the emperor's order to his lieutenant, carried by Monsieur de Sainte-Croix, who swam the Danube three times: "Die or recapture the village; the safety of the army is at stake! the bridges are down!"

THE AUTHOR.

but the courage of the full-blooded man, he lacks wit and ability. Like many generals to whom soldierly common sense, the distrust natural to men who are always in danger, and the habit of command impart an appearance of superiority, Montcornet impresses one tremendously at first glance; you think him a Titan, but he conceals a dwarf, like the pasteboard giant who salutes Elizabeth at the entrance to Kenilworth Castle. Quick-tempered and kind-hearted, overflowing with lordly pride, he has the caustic tongue of the soldier, is quick at retort, and quicker still with his hand. Although he may have been superb on a battle-field, he is insupportable in a house; he is familiar only with garrison love, with military love, to which the ancients, those ingenious myth-makers, assigned Eros, the son of Mars and Venus, for patron. Those delightful chroniclers of ancient religions provided themselves with half a score of different Loves. By studying the fathers and the attributes of those Loves, you will discover the most complete social nomenclature; and we imagine that we invent anything! When the globe whirls about like a sick man in his dreams, when the seas become continents, the Frenchmen of that day will find at the bottom of our present ocean a steamboat, a cannon, a newspaper, and a map, enveloped in aquatic plants.

"Now the Comtesse de Montcornet, my dear fellow, is a frail, delicate, timid little woman. What do you say to such a marriage? To one who knows the world, such accidents are so common that

well-assorted marriages are the exception. I have discovered how this fragile little woman arranges her strings to lead this tall, fat, square-shouldered general, precisely as he himself used to lead his cuirassiers.

"If Montcornet talks in a loud voice before his Virginie, she puts her finger on her lips and he holds his peace. The soldier goes to a kiosk fifty yards from the château to smoke his pipe and his cigars, and returns perfumed. Proud of his subjection, he turns to her, like a bear drunk with grapes, when anything is suggested to him, and says: 'If madame wishes.' When he goes to his wife's room with a heavy tread that makes the tiled floors creak like boards, if she cries out in her scared voice: 'Don't come in!' he performs a military half-wheel by the right flank, humbly remarking: 'You will let me know when I may speak with you,' in the same voice in which he shouted to his cuirassiers on the banks of the Danube: 'One must die, my children, and die nobly, when one cannot do otherwise!'—I have heard him make this touching remark in speaking of his wife: 'Not only do I love her, but I venerate her.'—When he is seized with one of the fits of anger that burst all bounds and escape in unmanageable cascades, the little woman goes to her room and lets him shout. But four or five days afterward she will say to him: 'Don't lose your temper; you may break a blood-vessel in your chest, to say nothing of the pain you cause me.' And thereupon the lion of Essling turns tail in order to

wipe away a tear. When he appears in the salon and we are busy talking: 'Leave us,' she says, 'he is reading to me,' and he leaves us.

"None but tall, strong, hot-tempered men, thunderbolts of war, diplomatists with Olympian heads, men of genius, display such immovable confidence, such generosity for weakness, such constant protection, such love without jealousy, such kindliness with women. Faith! I esteem the countess's science as far above dull, ill-humored virtues as the satin covering of a tête-à-tête sofa is preferable to the Utrecht velvet of a dingy bourgeois couch.

"I have been in this lovely spot six days, my dear fellow, and I do not weary of admiring the marvels of the park, dominated by frowning forests, where pretty paths run along beside the streams. Nature and its silence, the tranquil enjoyment, the indolent life to which it invites one, all have combined to seduce me. Oh! this is the true literature, there are never any faults of style in a level field. It would be true happiness to forget everything, even the *Débats*. You must have guessed that it has rained these two mornings. While the countess was sleeping, and Montcornet was inspecting his property, I have perforce kept the promise I so imprudently made, to write you.

"Hitherto, although born in Alençon, of an old judge and a prefect, so they say, and, although somewhat familiar with pasturages, I have always regarded as fabulous the stories of estates that yield four to five thousand francs a month. Money,

to my conception, was translated by four horrible words: work and publishers, newspapers and politics. When shall we have an estate where money will grow in some pretty landscape? It is what I wish for you, in the name of the stage, the press, and the book-trade. So be it.

"Will Florine be jealous of the late Mademoiselle Laguerre? Our modern Bourets have no French nobility to teach them how to live; three of them take a box at the Opéra, they club together for a spree, and they no longer cut up magnificently bound quartos in order to make them like the octavos in their libraries; they can hardly be induced to buy stitched books! What are we coming to? Adieu! my children! Continue to love

"Your sweet BLONDET."

If this letter, written by the most indolent pen of our age, had not, by a miraculous chance, been preserved, it would have been almost impossible to describe Aigues. Without this description, the doubly horrible series of events that took place there would perhaps be less interesting.

Many people expect, doubtless, to see the cuirass of the former colonel of the Imperial Guard illumined by a flash of light, to see his wrath kindled and falling like a deluge upon the little woman, in such a way as to bring about toward the end of this narrative what we find at the end of so many modern dramas, a bed-chamber tragedy. Could such a tragedy be enacted in that pretty salon with

paintings on blue cameo above the door, where the amorous scenes of mythology told their artless tales, where lovely fantastic birds were painted on the ceiling and the shutters, where monsters in Chinese porcelain laughed their heartiest over the mantel; where, upon the richest vases, blue and gold dragons twisted their convoluted tails about the rim which Japanese fancy had embellished with enamelled lace-work in colors; where tête-à-têtes, reclining-chairs, sofas, consoles, and étagères inspired that contemplative indolence which relaxes all energy? No: the drama here is not restricted to private life, it extends higher or lower. Do not look for passion, the truth will be only too dramatic. Furthermore, the historian ought never to forget that his mission is to assign to each one his part; the unfortunate and the wealthy are alike within the province of his pen; to him the peasant has the grandeur of his poverty, as the rich man has the pettiness of his foibles; lastly, the rich man has passions, the peasant has only wants, therefore the peasant is doubly poor; and even if, politically, his aggressions ought to be pitilessly repressed, humanly and religiously he is sacred.

II

A BUCOLIC OVERLOOKED BY VIRGIL

When a Parisian drops down in the country, he finds himself suddenly weaned from all his habits, and he soon feels the hours hang heavily, despite the most ingenious attentions of his friends. And so, realizing the impossibility of perpetuating tête-à-tête conversations, whose sources are so soon exhausted, the host and hostess calmly say to you: "You will be terribly bored here." It is a fact that, to appreciate the pleasures of the country, one must have interests there, must be familiar with the work carried on there and with the alternations of pain and pleasure, an everlasting symbol of human life.

When sleep has once recovered its equilibrium, when one has forgotten the fatigue of the journey and has fallen in step with country customs, the most difficult moment of château life to a Parisian who is neither a sportsman nor interested in agriculture, and who wears fine boots, is the early morning. Between the moment of waking and the breakfast-hour, the ladies are asleep or dressing, and are inaccessible; the master of the house has gone out early to look after his business: thus a Parisian is left

alone from eight o'clock to eleven, the hour selected for breakfast in almost all country-houses. After seeking to while away the time over the details of his toilette, he is soon left unoccupied once more, unless he has brought with him some work impossible of performance, which he will carry away again untouched, knowing naught of it but its difficulties. A writer, therefore, has no choice but to follow the winding avenues of the park, gape at the crows, or count the great trees. Now, the quieter the life one is leading, the more tedious those occupations become, unless you belong to the sect of turning Quakers, to the honorable body of carpenters or of bird-stuffers. If you were destined, like the landowners, to reside in the country, you would relieve your *ennui* with some geological, mineralogical, entomological, or botanical passion; but a man of sense does not acquire a vice in order to kill a fortnight. The most magnificent estate, therefore, the finest châteaux very speedily become insipid to those who possess only the view. The beauties of nature seem very paltry compared to their imitations on the stage. At such times Paris gleams resplendent in its every facet. Without the special interest that attaches us, like Blondet, *to the spot honored by the footstep, illumined by the eyes* of a certain person, we should envy the birds their wings, that we might fly back to the never-ending, exciting spectacles of Paris and its heart-rending struggles.

The long letter written by the journalist is calculated to suggest to penetrating minds that he had

reached, both morally and physically, that peculiar phase of satisfied passion and cloying happiness which fowls fattened by main force perfectly represent when, with their heads buried in their swelling gizzards, they stand on their legs, without the power or the desire to look at the most appetizing mess. And so, when his formidable letter was finished, Blondet felt the need of leaving the gardens of Armida behind him and doing something to enliven the deadly hiatus of the first three hours of the day; for between breakfast and dinner his time belonged to the fair châtelaine, who knew how to make it pass quickly. To keep a man of spirit for a whole month in the country, as Madame de Montcornet did, without once detecting on his face the false laugh of satiety, without once surprising the stifled yawn of an *ennui* that always betrays itself, is one of a woman's most noteworthy triumphs. An affection that endures that sort of test ought to be everlasting. It is hard to understand why women do not resort to that test to put their lovers to the proof; it is impossible for a fool, an egoist, or a small-minded man to stand it. Even Philip II., the Alexander of dissimulation, would have told his secrets during a month's tête-à-tête in the country. That is why kings lead lives of constant change and never allow any one person to see them for more than fifteen minutes.

Notwithstanding the attentions of one of the most charming of Parisian women, Emile Blondet enjoyed once more the long-forgotten pleasure of playing

truant. On the day following that on which his letter was finished, he was aroused betimes by François, the first *valet de chambre*, specially attached to his person, with the intention of exploring the valley of the Avonne.

The Avonne is the little river which, being swollen above Conches by numerous streams, some of which flow from springs on the Aigues estate, empties at Ville-aux-Fayes into one of the most considerable affluents of the Seine. The geographical situation of the Avonne, upon which logs could be floated for about four leagues, had, since Jean Rouvet's invention, greatly increased the value of the forests of Aigues, Soulanges, and Ronquerolles, which lay on the crest of the hills at whose foot the charming stream flows. The park of Aigues occupied the larger part of the valley between the river which Aigues forest, so-called, borders on both sides, and the great royal road, whose location is indicated on the horizon by lines of old gnarled elms, on a hillside parallel to the slope of the so-called mountains of the Avonne, the first row of benches of the magnificent amphitheatre called the Morvan.

Vulgar as the comparison may seem, the park, lying thus in the heart of the valley, resembles an immense fish, whose head touches the village of Conches, and his tail the hamlet of Blangy; for, being longer than it is wide, it spreads out in the centre to a width of about a mile, while it is only about a sixth of a mile wide near Conches, and a fifth near Blangy. The location of the estate,

between three villages and only a league from the little town of Soulanges, from which you descend to this garden of Eden, may have fomented the war and induced the excesses which form the principal interest of this Scene. If, when viewed from the high-road, from the higher parts of Ville-aux-Fayes, the paradise of Aigues led casual travellers to commit the sin of envy, how could the rich bourgeois of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, who admired it every hour in the day, be expected to be more virtuous?

This last topographical detail was essential to an understanding of the location and utility of the four gates through which you entered the park of Aigues, entirely surrounded, as it was, by walls, except in those spots where nature had arranged fine views, and where sunken ha-has had been placed. The four gates, called the Conches gate, the Avonne gate, the Blangy gate, and the Avenue gate, were such excellent examples of the genius of the epochs when they were constructed, that, in the interest of archæologists, they will be described, but as succinctly as Blondet has already described the Avenue gate.

After a week of extended promenades with the countess, the illustrious editor of the *Débats* was thoroughly familiar with the Chinese pagoda, the bridges, the islets, the summer-house, the châlet, the ruins of the temple, the Babylonian ice-house, the kiosks, in a word, with all the devices invented by landscape-gardeners with nine hundred acres to

work upon; he determined, therefore, to explore the sources of the Avonne, which the general and the countess extolled daily, forming every evening a plan, forgotten the next morning, to pay them a visit.

Above the park of Aigues, the Avonne resembles an Alpine torrent. Sometimes it hollows out a bed between high rocks; sometimes it plunges out of sight, as in a deep vat; in one place, brooks tumble abruptly into it in the shape of waterfalls; in another place, it spreads out like the Loire, stirring up the sand and making the floating of logs impossible by reason of the constant shifting of the channel. Blondet took the shortest road through the labyrinths of the park to the Conches gate. That gate demands a few words, which will be found to be replete with historical details concerning the property.

The founder of Aigues was a younger son of the Soulanges family, enriched by marriage, who desired to flout his elder brother. To that same feeling we owe the fairy-like beauties of Isola Bella on Lago Maggiore. In the Middle Ages, the château of Aigues was situated on the Avonne. Of that château, the gateway alone exists, consisting of a porch like those in fortified towns, flanked by two pepper-box turrets. Above the arch of the porch were several courses of heavy stone, embellished with vegetation, and pierced by three large windows with crossbars. A winding staircase in one of the turrets led up to two rooms, and the kitchen occupied the second turret. The roof of the porch, peaked, as in all old structures, was made notable by two weathercocks,

perched at the ends of an iron bar of curious design. Many places have no *hôtel de ville* so magnificent as that gateway. On the outer side, the keystone of the arch bore the coat-of-arms of the Soulanges, in excellent preservation, by reason of the hardness of the selected stone, whereon the chisel of the image-cutter had carved: *azure, three bees impaled argent, fesse over-all gules, charged with five cresslets or, with sharpened feet;* and it bore the heraldic pinking imposed upon younger sons. Blondet deciphered the device: "*Je soule agir,*"* one of the plays upon words which the crusaders amused themselves by making on their own names, and which recalls an excellent political maxim, unfortunately forgotten by Montcornet, as we shall see. The gate, which was opened for Blondet by a pretty girl, was an old wooden affair, laden with iron quincunxes. The keeper, awakened by the creaking of the hinges, appeared at the window in his shirt.

"How is this! our keepers still in bed at this time of day?" said the Parisian to himself, priding himself on his familiarity with forest customs.

After a walk of about fifteen minutes, he reached the sources of the river, abreast of Conches, and his eyes were enchanted by one of those landscapes whose description, like the history of France, should be written in a thousand volumes or in a single one. We will content ourselves with two paragraphs.

A swelling cliff, covered with a velvety growth of

* *I am satiated with action.* The play upon words apparently consists in the resemblance between *soule agir* and Soulanges.

dwarf shrubs and eaten into at its foot by the Avonne,—an arrangement which causes it to resemble in some degree an enormous turtle astride the stream,—forms an arch through which you see a small sheet of water, as smooth as a mirror, where the Avonne seems to have fallen asleep, ending in the distance in a waterfall over huge rocks, where stunted willows sway constantly back and forth under the pressure of the water, as if worked by springs.

Beyond the waterfall, the hillsides, perpendicular as the moss and heather covered cliffs along the Rhine, and like them intersected by slaty ridges, discharge here and there bubbling white streams into the receptacle formed by a narrow tract of meadow land, always abundantly watered and always green; and then, in striking contrast to that wild and solitary natural scenery, the outlying gardens of Conches appear on the other side of the picturesque chaos, on the edge of the pastures, with the clustered houses of the village and its church-steeple.

There are the two paragraphs, but the sunrise, the fresh, pure air, the pungent dew, the concert of the woods and streams!—those you must imagine!

"Faith! it's almost as fine as the Opéra!" said Blondet to himself, as he ascended the unnavigable Avonne, whose capricious turns and windings contrasted strangely with the straight, deep, silent canal of the lower Avonne, lined by the great trees of Aigues forest.

Blondet did not pursue his morning walk very far; he was soon stopped by one of the peasants, who, in this drama, are supernumeraries so essential to the action that the reader will hesitate, perhaps, as to which are the principal rôles.

When he reached a group of rocks where the principal source of the river is closely confined, as if between two doors, the brilliant writer noticed a man whose absolute immobility would have been quite capable of arousing the curiosity of a newspaper man, even if the costume and general appearance of the animate statue had not profoundly interested him.

He recognized in this humble individual one of the old men who have such attraction for Charlet's pencil, who resembled the troopers of that Homer of the soldier by virtue of a solid frame well adapted to bear misfortune, and his immortal sweepers by virtue of a red, blotched face, ill-adapted to express resignation. A hat of coarse felt, whose brim was attached to the crown only at intervals, protected his almost bald head from the vagaries of the weather; two locks of hair protruded from it, of dazzling snowy whiteness, and arranged as in all the classic pictures of the Everlasting Father—hair which a painter would have paid four francs an hour to copy. By the way in which the sunken cheeks seemed to prolong the mouth, you at once divined that the old man applied more frequently to the cask than to the bread-pan. His closely-cut, sparse white beard gave a threatening expression to his profile by reason of its

bristling stiffness. His eyes, which were too small for his enormous face and were set at an angle like those of the pig, expressed at once cunning and indolence; but at that moment they seemed to cast a sort of gleam, his gaze was fixed so intently upon the stream. The poor man's only clothing was a blouse that had once been blue and trousers of the coarse canvas used in Paris for making packages. Any townsman would have shuddered to see his feet in the broken clogs which had not even a wisp of straw stuffed in the cracks. The blouse and trousers were certainly of no value, except to go into the vat of a paper-mill.

Upon examining this rustic Diogenes, Blondet admitted the existence of the type of peasant we see in old tapestries, old pictures, old sculptures, which had theretofore seemed to him entirely imaginary. He no longer absolutely condemned the school of the ugly, understanding that, in man, beauty is simply a flattering exception, a chimera in which he does his utmost to believe.

"What can be such a creature's ideas and morals, what is he thinking of?" thought Blondet, seized with curiosity. "Is he my fellow? We have nothing in common but shape, and yet—!"

He studied the rigidity peculiar to the tissues of those who live in the open air, accustomed to the irregularities of the atmosphere, to endure excessive heat and excessive cold—everything, in short—whose skin is almost like a tanned hide, and whose nerves are as powerful a protection against physical pain as those of the Arabs or the Russians.

"There you have one of Cooper's Redskins," said Blondet to himself; "there's no need to go to America to study savages."

Although the Parisian was within two steps, the old man did not turn his head, but kept his eyes upon the opposite bank with the fixity that Indian fakirs impart to their glassy eyes and anchylosed limbs. Impelled by a sort of magnetism, which is more easily communicated than is generally supposed, Blondet finally looked in the same direction.

"Well, goodman, what is there down there?" he asked, after a long quarter of an hour, during which he had failed to discover anything to explain that intent gaze.

"Sh!" whispered the old man, motioning to Blondet not to set the air in motion with his voice; "you'll scare her."

"Who?"

"An otter, my dear *môsieu*. If she hears you, it'd be just like her to sneak off under water! Just a minute ago, she jumped up there, d'ye see! where the water's boiling. Oh! she's watchin' a fish; but when she goes to try to get into her hole, my boy'll grab her. The otter's the scarcest kind of a thing, d'ye see. She's scientific game, nice eatin', too, all the same; they'd pay me ten francs for her at Aigues, for their lady keeps fast, and to-morrow's a fast-day. The last lady, her as is dead, used to pay me as high as twenty francs, and she'd give me back the skin!—Mouche," he called in an undertone, "look sharp!"

On the other side of the arm of the Avonne, Blondet saw a pair of eyes shining like cats' eyes under a clump of alders; then he saw the sun-burned brow and tangled hair of a child of some twelve years, who lay on his belly and waved his hand in the direction of the otter to assure the old man that he would not lose sight of her. Blondet, completely subjugated by the devouring hopefulness of the old man and the child, allowed himself to be bitten by the demon of the chase.

That demon with two claws, hope and curiosity, leads you where he will.

"We sell the skins to hatmakers," continued the old man. "It's so fine and soft! They use it for caps."

"Do you think so, old man?" said Blondet, with a smile.

"Of course, *môsieu*, you ought to know more about it than me, although I'm seventy year old," replied the old man, humbly and respectfully, assuming the attitude of a dispenser of holy water, "and perhaps you might be able to tell me why stage-drivers and wine merchants set so much by it?"

Blondet, that master of irony, already put on his guard by the word *scientific*, in memory of the Maréchal de Richelieu, suspected that the old peasant was laughing at him; but he was undeceived by the ingenuousness of the attitude and the idiocy of the expression.

"In my young days, we used to see lots of otter; the country hereabout suits 'em so well!" continued

the goodman; "but they've hunted 'em out so, that it's as much as ever if we see the tail of one in seven years now.—And so the sub-prefect at Ville-aux-Fayes—does *môsieu* know him? For all he's a Parisian, he's a nice young fellow like you and likes cur'us things. So you see, knowin' my knack for catchin' otter,—for I know the beasts about as well as you know your alphabet,—he says to me like this: 'Père Fourchon, when you find an otter,' he says, 'bring her to me, I'll pay you well for her, and if she's got white spots on her back,' he says, 'I'll give you thirty francs.' That's what he says to me by the gate of Ville-aux-Fayes, as true as I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. There's another man o' larnin' at Soulanges, Môsieu Gourdon, our doctor, who's getting up a natural hist'ry collection, so they say, that you can't find the likes of at Dijon,—in fact, he's the first scholar in this neighborhood,—and he'd give me a big price for her!—He knows how to stuff men and beasts! And my boy will have it that this otter's got some white hairs.—'If that's so,' I says to him, 'the good Lord's doing well by us this mornin'!'—See how the water boils, will ye? Oh! she's there. Though the critters do live in a burrow like, they stay under water whole days to a time.—Ah! she heard you, my dear môsieu, she suspects somethin', for there's no animals sharper than them; they're worse'n a woman!"

"Perhaps that's why otter is feminine?" Blondet suggested.

"*Dame!* môsieu, you're from Paris, and you know more about that than we do; but you'd a' done better for us if you'd kept abed this mornin', for d'ye see that little wave like? she's gone off under water.—Here, Mouche! she heard môsieu, and she's just as likely as not to keep us hangin' round till midnight; let's go home.—There swims off our thirty francs!"

Mouche rose regretfully; he looked at the spot where the bubbles of water were coming to the surface, pointing his finger at them and not losing all hope. The curly-haired child, with a brown face like those of the angels in fifteenth-century pictures, looked as if he were in short-clothes, for his trousers ended at the knees in lines of tatters, embellished with brambles and dead leaves. That necessary article of apparel was held in place by two pieces of hemp rope in guise of suspenders; a canvas shirt of the same quality as the old man's trousers, but made thicker by furry patches, disclosed a sun-burned breast. It will be seen that Mouche's costume outdid Père Fourchon's in simplicity.

"They seem to be very good-natured people hereabout," said Blondet to himself; "in the outskirts of Paris they would swear roundly at a bourgeois who frightened away their game!"

And as he had never seen an otter, not even at the museum, he was delighted with that episode of his promenade.

"Come, come," he said, touched to see the old man turning to go away without asking for any

recompense, "you say you're an accomplished otter-hunter. Suppose you were sure the otter was still there?"

On the other side of the stream, Mouche raised his finger and pointed to some bubbles of air that came from the bottom of the stream and expired in circles in the centre of the basin.

"She's come back," said Père Fourchon, "she just breathed, the beggar! it's her that made them bubbles. How do the beasts make out to breathe under water? But they're so full of mischief they laugh at science."

"Well," rejoined Blondet, to whom the last remark seemed to be a joke, due rather to traditional peasant wit than to the individual, "wait and catch the otter."

"And what about our day, Mouche's and mine?"

"What's your day worth?"

"Both of us, my apprentice and me? Five francs," said the old man, looking Blondet in the eye with a hesitation which betrayed an enormous overvaluation.

The journalist took ten francs from his pocket.

"Here are ten," he said, "and I'll give you as much more for the otter."

"She won't cost you much if she's got white spots on her back, for the sub-prefect he told me that there ain't only one of that kind in our museum.—He knows what he's talking about, our sub-prefect does! he's nobody's fool. If I hunt otter, Môsieu des Lupeaulx hunts Môsieu Gaubertin's

daughter, who's got a fine white dowry on her back.—Look you, my dear môsieu, I don't mean to order you round, but just you go and stand on that rock yonder in the middle of the Avonne. When we've driven out the otter, she'll go down stream, for the beasts are just cute enough to go up above their hole to fish, and when they're loaded with fish, they know they can go down stream a sight better. Didn't I tell you they was shrewd?—If I'd larned cunning in their school, I'd be livin' on my income to-day.—I found out too late that ye must go up stream early in the morning to find the game before anybody else. Fact is somebody bewitched me when I was born! Betwixt the three of us, p'raps we'll be sharper'n that there otter."

"How so, my old necromancer?"

"Oh! we're such beasts ourselves, we peasants, that we get to understand the other beasts. This is what we'll do. When the otter sets out to go home, we'll scare her here and you'll scare her down yonder; she'll be so scared by the whole of us that she'll make for the shore; if she tries to run on land, she's lost. They can't walk; they're made to swim with their web feet. Oh! it'll amuse you, for its like killin' two birds with one stone, you fish and hunt all at once!—The general, where you're stayin' at Aigues, came here three days runnin', he got so interested in it!"

Blondet, provided with a branch cut by the old man, who told him to use it to beat the water when

ON THE BANKS OF THE AVONNE

"Well, goodman, what is there down there?" he asked, after a long quarter of an hour, during which he had failed to discover anything to explain that intent gaze.

"Sh!" whispered the old man, motioning to Blondet not to set the air in motion with his voice; "you'll scare her."

"Who?"

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he gave the word, took his position in the middle of the Avonne, leaping from stone to stone.

"That's good, my dear môsieu—"

Blondet stood there, heedless of the flight of time; for, at brief intervals, a gesture from the old man made him hope for a fortunate close to the adventure; moreover, nothing makes time pass so quickly as anticipation of the excitement that is to follow the profound silence of the ambush.

"Père Fourchon," said the child, in an undertone, when he saw that he and the old man were alone, "there's an otter there after all—"

"Do you see one?"

"There she is!"

The old man was stupefied to see the red-brown pelt of an otter between two channels.

"She's right onto me!" said the little one.

"Just hit her a sharp tap on the head and jump into the water and hold her under, but don't ye let her go—"

Mouche plunged into the Avonne like a frightened frog.

"Come! come! my dear môsieu," said Père Fourchon to Blondet, taking off his clogs and jumping into the Avonne, in his turn; "scare her off! Don't you see her? She's swimmin' right at you!"

The old man rushed at Blondet, ploughing through the water and shouting with the seriousness that country people maintain when they are most excited:

"Don't ye see her there, slippin' by the rocks?"

Blondet, stationed by the old man so that he had the sun in his eyes, beat the water fiercely.

"There! there! toward the rocks!" cried Père Fourchon; "her hole's over there, to your left."

Carried away by his ill-temper, which a long period of waiting had sharpened, Blondet slipped about on the stones and took a foot-bath.

"Hold hard! my dear môsieu, hold hard! there you be.—Oh! twenty damnations! there she goes in between your legs! she's gone! she's gone!" said the old man, in despair.

And, as if carried away by the excitement of the chase, the peasant rushed forward through the water until he stood in front of Blondet.

"We lost her all on account of you!" continued Père Fourchon, as Blondet gave him his hand and he emerged from the water like a Triton, but a conquered Triton. "The beggar's down there under the rocks!—She's left her fish behind her," he added, pointing to something floating on the water in the distance.—"We shall have the tench, for tench is what it is!"

At that moment, a mounted servant in livery, leading another horse by the bridle, came galloping along the Conches road.

"Hallo, there's somebody from the château; seems like they're lookin' for you," said the goodman. "If you want to cross the river, I'll just give you my hand. Oh! I don't mind a little wettin', it saves washin'!"

"And how about taking cold?" said Blondet.

"Bah! don't you see that the sun has seasoned Mouche and me like clay pipes? Just lean on me, my dear môsieu. You're from Paris, you see, and for all you know so much, you don't know how to stand on our rocks. If you stay here long, you'll learn lots o' things in the book o' nater, though they do say you write in the *new papers*."

Blondet had reached the other bank of the Avonne, when Charles, the footman, spied him.

"Ah! monsieur," he cried, "you can't imagine how anxious madame is since she learned that you left the park by the Conches gate; she thinks you are drowned. Three times they have rung the second breakfast bell with all their might, after calling you all over the park, where monsieur le curé is still looking for you."

"Why, what time is it, Charles?"

"Quarter to twelve!"

"Help me to mount."

"Has monsieur, by any chance, been taken in by Père Fourchon's otter?" said the man, noticing the water on Blondet's boots and trousers.

The bare question enlightened the journalist.

"Don't say a word about it, Charles, and I'll not forget you!" he cried.

"Oh! *pardi*, monsieur le comte himself was taken in by Père Fourchon's otter," replied the servant. "As soon as a stranger arrives at Aigues, Père Fourchon is on the lookout, and if the gentleman goes to see the sources of the Avonne, he sells him his otter. He plays the game so well that monsieur

le comte went back three times and paid him for six days while they sat and watched the water flow."

"And I fancied that I had seen in Potier, in Baptiste the younger, in Michot, and in Monrose the greatest actors of this age!" said Blondet to himself; "what are they beside this beggar?"

"Oh! Père Fourchon is very good at that trick," said Charles. "He has another string to his bow, too, for he's a stringmaker by trade. His ropewalk is along the wall, by the Blangy gate. If you happen to touch any of his rope, he'll tangle you up so, that you long to turn the wheel and make a little yourself; then he asks you for the fee due the master from the apprentice. Madame was caught by that and gave him twenty francs. He's the king of sharpers," said Charles, using a polite phrase.

The lackey's loquacity allowed Blondet to indulge in some reflections upon the profound astuteness of the peasant class, remembering all that he had heard from his father, the Alençon magistrate. Then, as all the raillery hidden beneath Père Fourchon's artful straightforwardness returned to his memory, illumined by the information confided to him by Charles, he confessed himself completely *done* by the old Burgundian beggar.

"You wouldn't believe, monsieur," said Charles, as they arrived at the door of the château, "how you have to distrust everybody and everything in the country, especially here, where the general isn't very popular."

"Why so?"

"Ah! *dame*, I don't know," Charles replied, assuming the foolish air to which servants shrewdly resort to cover their refusal to answer the questions of their betters, and which gave Blondet much food for thought.

"Ah! there you are, wanderer!" said the general, whom the sound of the horses' steps brought out upon the stoop.—"Here he is! be calm!" he cried to his wife, whose quick step could be heard drawing near.—"Only Abbé Brossette is missing now. Go and find him, Charles," he said to the servant.

III

THE WINE-SHOP

The so-called Blangy gate, erected by Bouret, consisted of two pillars with vermiculated work, each surmounted by a dog standing on his hind legs, and holding a shield between his forepaws. The proximity of the small house in which the manager of the estate lived had spared the financier the necessity of building a porter's lodge. Between the two pillars a sumptuous iron gate, in the style of that forged in Buffon's time for the Jardin des Plantes, opened upon a bit of pavement leading to the cantonal road, formerly carefully kept up by Aigues, and the Soulanges family, which connects Conches, Cerneux, Blangy, and Soulanges with Ville-aux-Fayes as by a garland, for the road is thickly lined with small estates surrounded by hedges and studded with pretty little houses peeping out from rose-bushes, honeysuckle, and climbing plants.

There, along a neat wall, extending as far as a ha-ha, over which the château obtained a view of the valley to a point beyond Soulanges, were the

rotten post, the old wheel, and the bar with rake-like teeth, which constitute the plant of a village ropemaker.

About half-past twelve, just as Blondet was taking his seat at one end of the table, opposite Abbé Brossette, and receiving the caressing reproaches of the countess, Père Fourchon and Mouche arrived at their establishment. From that vantage-ground, Père Fourchon, on the pretext of making rope, kept an eye upon Aigues, and could see the masters going in and out. So it was that not an open blind, a promenade *à deux*, or the most trifling incident in the life at the château escaped the espionage of the old man, who had only set up as a ropemaker some three years before, an unimportant circumstance which neither the keeper at Aigues nor the servants nor their masters had as yet noticed.

"Take a turn round by the Avonne gate while I go and stow away our rigging, and, when you've told 'em about it, of course they'll come and look for me at the *Grand-I-Vert*, where I'm going to wet my whistle, for it makes me thirsty to go into the water like that!—If you go about it as I tell you, you'll get a good breakfast out of 'em; try to speak to the countess and lay it onto me so that they'll think it's a good chance to come and sing me a moral tune!—There'll be some good wine to drink."

After these last instructions, which Mouche's crafty air rendered almost superfluous, the old ropemaker, with his otter under his arm, disappeared on the cantonal road.

Half-way from that pretty gate to the village there stood, at the time of Emile Blondet's visit to Aigues, one of those buildings which are seen nowhere but in France, and in France only where granite is scarce. Bits of brick picked up here and there, rough stones set like diamonds in a clayey soil, which formed solid though uneven walls, the roof upheld by stout branches of trees and covered with rushes and straw, the rough shutters, the door, everything about the hovel spoke of treasure-trove or of gifts extorted by importunity.

The peasant has the same instinct for his abode that the animal has for his den or his burrow, and that instinct was much in evidence in all the arrangements of the hovel. In the first place, the window and the door looked to the north. The house, being situated on a slight eminence in the stoniest part of a vine-growing region, was certain to be healthy. It was reached by three steps ingeniously constructed of stakes and boards and filled in with pebbles. Thus the water ran away very quickly. And, as the rain rarely comes from the north in Bourgogne, there was no dampness to rot the foundations, however light they might be. At the foot of the steps, along a path, was a rustic fence, almost hidden by a hedge of hawthorn and briars. An arbor, beneath which several wretched tables provided with rough benches invited the passers-by to seat themselves, covered the space between the house and the road. The interior was decorated by the flowers on the bank outside, roses,

gilliflowers, violets, all the flowers that cost nothing. A honeysuckle and a jasmine were climbing over the roof which was already covered with moss, despite its comparative newness.

Against the right side of his house, the proprietor had built a stable for two cows. In front of that structure of rough boards was a well-trodden barnyard, and in one corner stood an enormous heap of dung. On the other side of the house and arbor was a thatched shed supported by two tree trunks, under which were bestowed the vine-dressers' tools, their empty casks, and bunches of firewood piled around the hump formed by the oven, whose mouth is almost always found, in peasants' houses, under the mantel of the chimney-piece.

Adjoining the house was about an acre of land enclosed by a quickset hedge and filled with vines, cared for as the vines of the peasantry always are, so well manured, layered, and spaded that their leaves are the first to sprout of those within a radius of three leagues. A few trees, almonds, plums, and apricots, showed their slender heads here and there in the enclosure. Between the vines, potatoes or beans were generally planted. Behind the barnyard and toward the village was another small hatchet-shaped piece of land belonging to the house, damp and low and well-suited to the cultivation of cabbages and onions, the favorite vegetables of the working-class, and closed by a barred gate through which the cows passed, kneading the ground and leaving their traces spread about.

The house consisted of two rooms on the ground-floor, and the entrance door opened from the vineyard. On the vineyard side was a wooden staircase against the wall of the house, covered by a thatched roof and leading to the attic, which was lighted by a round bull's-eye window. Under that rustic staircase was a cellar built entirely of Bourgogne bricks, which contained a few casks of wine.

Although the peasant's kitchen outfit ordinarily consists of two utensils with which he does everything, a stove and an iron kettle, the hovel in question contained in addition two enormous saucepans, which hung above a small portable oven under the mantel of the fireplace. Notwithstanding that indication of affluence, the furniture harmonized with the exterior of the house. An earthen jar to hold water; wooden or pewter spoons for silverware, earthen plates, brown outside and white inside, but chipped and mended with rivets; lastly, around a stout table, white wooden chairs, and for floor the hard-trodden earth. Every five years the walls received a coating of whitewash, as did the slight timbers of the ceiling, from which hung flitches of bacon, bunches of onions, packages of candles, and the bags in which the peasant keeps his seeds; beside the bread-cupboard, an old-fashioned wardrobe of old walnut held the small supply of linen, the spare garments, and the Sunday clothes of the family.

Over the mantel gleamed an old poacher's fowling-piece; you would not give five francs for it: the

stock is scorched; the barrel, in no way showy, does not look as if it had been cleaned. You reflect that nothing better is required for the defence of a hovel with a simple latch on the door, and a gate in the fence that is never closed, and you wonder what possible purpose such a weapon can serve. In the first place, although the stock is of the simplest and roughest, the barrel is a carefully selected one, it came from a valuable gun, presented probably to some keeper or other. So the owner of that gun never misses his aim; there exists between his weapon and himself the same intimate acquaintance as between the mechanic and his tool. If the barrel must be raised or lowered a millimètre above or below the target, because it carries high or low even to that infinitesimal extent, the poacher knows it and obeys that law, without ever missing. Moreover, an artillery officer would find the essential parts of the weapon in good condition: nothing more nor less than is necessary. Upon everything that he appropriates, upon everything that he proposes to use, the peasant expends a proper amount of energy; he puts just the necessary work into it and nothing beyond. Of exterior perfection he never has any comprehension. An infallible judge of what necessity requires in everything, he knows all the degrees of force, and has the art, when he is working for the bourgeois, of giving the smallest possible amount for the greatest possible remuneration. In fact, that contemptible fowling-piece plays a prominent part in the existence of the family; you will soon learn how.

Have you thoroughly grasped the thousand and one details of this hovel, situated some five hundred yards from the pretty gate of the Aigues estate? Do you see it crouching there like a beggar at the gate of a palace? Ah! well, its moss-covered, velvety roof, its cackling hens, its wallowing sow, its lowing heifer, all this rustic poesy had a ghastly meaning. At the gate in the fence was a tall pole with a withered bouquet, composed of three pine branches and a cluster of oak-leaves, tied together with a rag, at the top. Over the gate a travelling painter had, for a breakfast, painted on a board two feet square a capital *I* in green on a white ground, and, for those who knew how to read, this pun, in twelve letters: *Au Grand-I-Vert.** At the left of the gate the eye was struck by the commonplace legend: *Good March Beer*, in bright colors, on a sign, whereon were the figures of a hussar and a woman in an excessively low-necked dress, flanking a jug running over with foam—both gaudily and roughly colored. And so, despite the flowers and the country air, the hovel exhaled the strong, sickening odor of wine and stale food that assails your nostrils as you pass the low eating-houses in the faubourgs of Paris.

Now you are familiar with the locality. These are the persons who lived there and their history, which contains more than one lesson for philanthropists:

The proprietor of the *Grand-I-Vert*, named François

* *At the Great Green I.*—The pun consists, apparently, in the resemblance in sound of *I-Vert* with *hiver* (*winter*).—*Au Grand Hiver* would mean *In Midwinter.*

Tonsard, should commend himself to the attention of philosophers by virtue of the way in which he had solved the problem of an indolent life and a busy life, so as to make indolence profitable and energy of no account.

A Jack-at-all-trades, he knew how to work the land, but for himself alone. For others he dug ditches, gathered wood, peeled the bark from trees or cut them down. In such work the bourgeois is at the laborer's mercy. Tonsard owed his bit of land to Mademoiselle Laguerre's generosity. From his boyhood, Tonsard had worked by the day for the gardener at the château, for there was not his equal in the province for trimming hedges and clipping yoke-elms, Indian chestnuts, and the other trees used for lining avenues. His name is sufficiently indicative of an hereditary talent. In the heart of the country, there exist privileges obtained and maintained with as much art as business men display in securing theirs. One day, as she was walking through the park, Mademoiselle overheard Tonsard, who was a shapely young fellow, say: "An acre of land would be enough to give me a living, and a good living too!" The kind-hearted creature, who was used to making people happy, gave him the acre of vineyard by the Blangy gate in return for a hundred days' work—a delicacy by no means understood!—and allowed him to remain at Aigues, where he lived with the servants of the château, who considered him the best fellow in all Bourgogne.

Poor Tonsard—that was the way everybody spoke

of him—worked about thirty days of the hundred he owed; the rest of the time he frittered away, laughing with mademoiselle's women, especially with Mademoiselle Cochet, her lady's maid, although she was as ugly as all actresses' lady's maids are. To jest with Mademoiselle Cochet meant so many things, that Soudry, the lucky gendarme mentioned in Blondet's letter, still looked askance at Tonsard after twenty-five years. The walnut wardrobe, and the bed with posts and head-curtains which adorned the sleeping-apartment of the *Grand-I-Vert*, were doubtless the fruit of one of their *little laughs*.

Once in possession of his vineyard, Tonsard answered the first person who suggested that mademoiselle gave it to him, with a:

"*Parguienne!* I bought it and paid for it. Do the bourgeois ever give us anything, I'd like to know? Is a hundred days' work nothing? It cost me three hundred francs and it's full of stones!"

That remark did not pass beyond the limits of the lower social stratum.

Thereupon Tonsard built his house himself, picking up the materials here and there, inducing one person and another to lend him a hand, laying hold of things that were cast off at the château, or asking for and always obtaining them. A wretched *Montreuil* door, demolished in order to be more easily carried away, became the door of the stable. The window came from an old hothouse that was torn down. Thus the débris of the château served to erect that fatal hovel.

Saved from the conscription by Gaubertin, the steward of Aigues, whose father was public prosecutor of the department and who could deny Mademoiselle Cochet nothing, Tonsard married as soon as his house was finished and his vines began to bear. A youth of twenty-three, on familiar terms with the household of Aigues, this rascal, to whom mademoiselle had given an acre of land and who seemed a hard worker, had the art to cause all his negative good qualities to be proclaimed aloud, and he obtained the hand of a farmer's daughter on the Ronquerolles estate, which lay beyond the forest of Aigues.

That farmer hired half of a farm which was degenerating in his hands for lack of a mistress. A widower, and inconsolable, he sought, after the English fashion, to drown his cares in wine; but when he ceased to think of his poor dear defunct, he found himself married to the flowing bowl, as the village-jesters said. In a short time, from a farmer the father-in-law became a laborer, but a drunken, lazy laborer, ill-tempered and evil-minded, capable of anything, as people of the lower class generally are, when they relapse from comparative comfort into poverty. This man, whom his practical knowledge and his ability to read and write placed above other laborers, but whom his vices kept on the level of beggars, had just measured swords on the banks of the Avonne, as we have seen, with one of the brightest men in Paris, in a pastoral overlooked by Virgil.

Père Fourchon, who was originally school-master at Blangy, lost his place because of his misconduct and his ideas concerning public instruction. He devoted much more time to helping the children make boats and chickens with their alphabets than to teaching them to read; he scolded them in such strange fashion when they had been pilfering fruit, that his admonitions might have passed for lessons as to the proper method of scaling walls. The good people of Soulanges still quote his reply to a little fellow who came late to school and excused himself thus:

"*Dame!* m'sieur, I had to take our horse—*chevau*—to water!"

"We say *cheval, animau!*"

Having ceased to be a pedagogue, he was appointed postman. In that position, which so many old soldiers fill after retiring from service, Père Fourchon was reprimanded every day. Sometimes he left his letters in wine-shops; sometimes he kept them upon him. When he was drunk, he delivered the packets belonging to one village in another, and when he was sober, he read the letters. He was therefore soon dismissed. Unable to fill any position in the government, Père Fourchon ended by becoming a manufacturer. In the country, paupers always carry on some trade or other, they all make a show of earning an honest living. At the age of sixty-eight the old fellow undertook ropemaking on a small scale, one of the lines of trade which require the least capital. The workshop is, as we have

seen, the first wall that comes to hand, the machinery is worth barely ten francs, the apprentice sleeps, as does his master, in a barn, and lives on what he picks up. The rapacity of the law on the subject of doors and windows is without force in the open air. The raw material for the manufacture was borrowed. But the principal income of Père Fourchon and his apprentice, Mouche, the natural son of one of his natural daughters, was derived from the otter-hunting, and from the breakfasts or dinners given them by people who could neither read nor write, and who made use of Père Fourchon's talents when they had a letter to write or an account to present. Lastly, he could play the clarinet, and accompanied one of his friends, one Vermichel, the fiddler of Soulanges, to village weddings and to the *Tivoli* at Soulanges on the days of the great balls.

Vermichel's name was Michael Vert; but the play upon his real name came to be so commonly used that Brunet, bailiff of the justice of the peace at Soulanges, styled him, in official documents, Michel-Jean-Jérôme-Vert, called *Vermichel, praticien.* Vermichel, a very distinguished violinist of the old Bourgogne regiment, through gratitude for the services rendered him by Papa Fourchon, had procured for him the position of *praticien,* which usually devolves, in the country districts, on those who are able to sign their names. Père Fourchon acted, therefore, as witness or *praticien* to judicial documents when Sieur Brunet had business to transact

in the communes of Cerneux, Conches, and Blangy. Vermichel and Fourchon, bound together by a friendship that counted twenty years over the bottle, almost constituted a whole social circle in themselves.

Mouche and Fourchon, united by vice as Mentor and Telemachus were of old by virtue, travelled about like them in search of their daily bread, *panis angelorum*, the only Latin words that remained in the old villager's mind. They picked up the crumbs that fell from the table of the *Grand-I-Vert*, and those of the neighboring châteaux, for the two together, in their busiest, most prosperous years, had never been able to make three hundred and sixty fathoms of rope on an average. In the first place, no dealer within a radius of twenty leagues would have trusted either Fourchon or Mouche with hemp. The old man, anticipating the miracles of modern chemistry, knew too well how to transform hemp into the blessed juice of the vine. In the second place, his threefold functions, as public scrivener for three communes, as *praticien* for the justice of the peace, and as clarinet-player, were detrimental, he said, to the development of his business.

Thus Tonsard was speedily disappointed in his fondly cherished hope of attaining something like a competence by addition to his property. The slothful son-in-law, as frequently happens, fell in with a do-nothing father-in-law. His affairs were likely to progress the less smoothly because La Tonsard, who was a tall, well-shaped young woman,

blessed with a sort of rustic beauty, did not like to work in the open air. Tonsard blamed his wife for her father's backslidings, and maltreated her, following out the scheme of vengeance peculiar to the common people, whose minds, being occupied solely with the effect, rarely go back to the cause.

Finding her chain a galling one, the woman determined to lighten it. She made use of Tonsard's vice to make herself mistress of him. A glutton herself and fond of taking her ease, she encouraged his gluttony and indolence. In the first place, she was able to secure the favor of the people at the château, unrebuked by Tonsard as to her methods, in view of the results achieved. He troubled himself very little about what his wife did, provided that she did whatever he wanted. That is the tacit bargain that is made in one household out of two. And so La Tonsard created the ale-house of the *Grand-I-Vert*, whose first customers were the people of the Aigues household, keepers, and huntsmen.

Gaubertin, Mademoiselle Laguerre's steward, who was one of La Belle Tonsard's first customers, gave her several casks of excellent wine to tickle the palates of her clientage. The effect of these presents, which were continued at intervals as long as the steward remained unmarried, and the woman's reputation as a by no means shy beauty, which made her an attraction to the Don Juans of the valley, brought an abundance of business to the *Grand-I-Vert*. Being an epicure herself, La Tonsard became an excellent cook, and although her

talents were put forth only upon the dishes that are common in the country, jugged hare, game-pie, *matelote* and omelette, she was considered throughout the neighborhood to be a past-mistress in the art of cooking one of those repasts which are eaten at the upper end of the table, and in which condiments are used with unsparing hand to incite thirst. In two years she made herself mistress of Tonsard in this way, and started him upon an evil road which he asked nothing better than to follow.

The rascal practised poaching constantly, having nothing to fear. His wife's relations with Gaubertin the steward, with the private keepers and the rustic authorities, and the lax enforcement of the law at the time, assured him impunity. As soon as his children were large enough, he made them the instruments of his comfort, exhibiting no more scruple respecting their morals than respecting his wife's. He had two sons and two daughters. Tonsard, who lived, as did his wife, from day to day, would have seen the end of his days of joyous indolence, if he had not constantly kept in force under his roof the quasi-martial law requiring all to work for the maintenance of his well-being, which redounded to the benefit of the whole family, of course. In the days when his family was supported at the expense of those from whom his wife was able to extort presents, the resources and the budget of the *Grand-I-Vert* were as follows:

Tonsard's aged mother, and his two daughters, Catherine and Marie, went regularly to the woods

and returned twice a day laden so heavily that they were bent double by the weight of a bundle of sticks that reached down to their ankles and extended two feet above their heads. Although the outside was always of dead wood, there was green wood within, cut frequently from the younger growth of trees. Tonsard literally procured his winter's store of wood in the forest of Aigues. The father and his two sons were poaching all the time. From September to March, hares, rabbits, partridges, thrushes, kids, all the game that was not eaten at the house, was sold at Blangy, in the small town of Soulanges, the chief place of the canton, where Tonsard's daughters sold milk, and whence they brought back every day the latest news, peddling there the gossip of Aigues, Cerneux, and Conches. When the hunting was at an end, the three Tonsards spread nets. If the nets were too productive, La Tonsard made pies and sent them to Ville-aux-Fayes. In harvest time, seven Tonsards—the old mother, the two sons, so long as they were under seventeen, the two daughters, old Fourchon, and Mouche—went gleaning and gathered well-nigh sixteen bushels a day, taking rye, barley, wheat, all grains that were good to grind.

The two cows, which were tended at first by the younger girl along the roadsides, generally escaped into the pastures of Aigues; but as the children were either beaten or deprived of some delicacy for the slightest offence that was too flagrant for the keepers not to take notice of, they had acquired an extraordinary degree of skill in hearing hostile footsteps,

and it very rarely happened that the communal keeper or the Aigues keeper caught them at fault. Moreover, the relations of those worthy functionaries with Tonsard and his wife placed bandages over their eyes. The beasts, led by long ropes, were the more ready to obey a single note of recall, a special cry that summoned them back to the common land, because they knew that, when the danger had passed, they could finish their meal on the neighbor's premises. Old Mother Tonsard, who was constantly growing weaker, had succeeded Mouche, since Fourchon had kept his natural grandson with him on the pretext of looking after his education. Marie and Catherine made hay in the woods. They had found places where the pretty, fine forest-grass grew, and they cut it and dried it and made it into bundles and stored it in the barn; in that way they provided two-thirds of the necessary winter's fodder for the cows, which were taken out on fine days to graze on certain well-known spots where the grass was still green. There are in certain parts of the valley of Aigues, as in all regions dominated by mountain ranges, Piedmont and Lombardy for instance, tracts of land where grass grows in winter. These tracts, called in Italy *marciti*, are very valuable; but, in France, they must have neither too much ice nor too much snow. The phenomenon is due, doubtless, to a particular exposure and to the infiltration of water which keeps the ground at a high temperature.

The two calves produced about eighty francs.

The milk, making allowance for the time when the cows were calving or nursing their offspring, brought in about a hundred and sixty francs; the cows also supplied the household with milk. Tonsard earned a hundred and fifty francs or thereabout working by the day here and there.

The proceeds of the food and wine served to customers amounted to some three hundred francs, after deducting all expenses, for this custom, entirely transient, came only at certain times and during certain seasons of the year; moreover, the customers who regaled themselves there always notified Tonsard and his wife, who thereupon procured at the town the small amount of meat and supplies they required. The wine from Tonsard's vineyard was sold in ordinary years at twenty francs a cask, without the cask, to the keeper of a wine-shop at Soulanges with whom Tonsard did business. In some years of abundant harvests, Tonsard's acre yielded twelve casks, but the average was eight casks, and he kept half of it for his own use. In wine-growing districts, the gleaning of the vines constitutes the *hallebotage*. By *hallebotage* the Tonsard family picked up about three casks of wine. But, under the shelter of custom, they were utterly without conscience in their proceedings: they entered the vineyards before the grape-pickers had gone; just as they raided the fields of wheat when the sheaves were heaped up awaiting the wains. Thus the seven or eight casks of wine, including that due to *hallebotage* as well as that produced by their own vines, were sold at

a good price. But to be charged against that sum were the losses the *Grand-I-Vert* incurred by reason of the wine consumed by Tonsard and his wife, both of whom were in the habit of eating the best pieces and of drinking better wine than they sold, wine furnished by their correspondent at Soulanges in payment for theirs. The whole income of the family amounted to about nine hundred francs, for they fattened two pigs a year, one for themselves, the other to sell.

The laboring men and all the ne'er-do-wells in the neighborhood eventually became attached to the wine-shop of the *Grand-I-Vert*, as well because of La Tonsard's talents, as of the good-fellowship existing between the family and the common people in the valley. The two daughters, both remarkably pretty, continued their mother's morals. Lastly, the antiquity of the *Grand-I-Vert*, which dated from 1795, made it a sacred thing in the country. From Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes the laboring men repaired thither to conclude their bargains and to learn the news absorbed by Tonsard's daughters, by Mouche and by Fourchon, and retailed by Vermichel and by Brunet, the most popular court official at Soulanges, when he came there in quest of his *praticien*. There the prices of hay and wine, of a day's wages and of piecework, were fixed. Tonsard, the sovereign judge in such matters, gave consultations there, while drinking with his customers. Soulanges was commonly said throughout the district to be a town devoted to social observances and amusement; Blangy

was the commercial town, although it was crushed by the great business centre, Ville-aux-Fayes, which had become in twenty-five years the capital of that magnificent valley. The market for cattle and grains was held on the square at Blangy, and its prices regulated prices throughout the arrondissement.

By remaining in the house, La Tonsard had retained her fresh, fair complexion and her plumpness, whereas the women who work in the fields fade as quickly as the flowers and are old at thirty. La Tonsard liked to be well-dressed. She was nothing more than neat; but, in a village, neatness serves the purpose as well as magnificence. The girls, who dressed better than was consistent with their poverty, followed their mother's example. Under their skirts, which were almost elegant, comparatively speaking, they wore linen finer than that of the wealthiest peasant women. On holidays they appeared in pretty dresses, procured God knows how! The servants at Aigues sold them, for a price that was easily paid, the cast-off dresses of the maids, which had swept the pavements of Paris, and which, being made over for the use of Marie and Catherine, were triumphantly displayed at the sign of the *Grand-I-Vert*. These two girls, the gypsies of the valley, did not receive a sou from their parents, who simply fed them and provided them with horrible beds, with their grandmother, in the loft, where their brothers also slept, burrowing in the hay like animals. Neither father nor mother gave a thought to the evils of such promiscuity.

The age of iron and the age of gold resemble each other more than you think. In one, you look out for nothing; in the other, you look out for everything; so far as society is concerned, the result is perhaps the same. The presence of old Mother Tonsard, which seemed to be rather a necessity than a measure of security, was an additional element of immorality.

Abbé Brossette, after studying the morals of his parishioners, made this profound remark to a bishop:

"Monseigneur, when one sees how these peasants lean upon their poverty, one conceives that they tremble at the thought of losing that excuse for their dissolute lives."

Although everybody was well aware of the utter unscrupulousness and lack of principle of the family, no one had a word to say against the morals of the *Grand-I-Vert*. At the beginning of this Scene, it seems necessary to explain, once for all, to persons accustomed to the morality in vogue among bourgeois families, that the peasantry have absolutely no delicacy in the matter of domestic morals. They do not invoke morality in respect to the seduction of one of their daughters, unless the seducer is rich and frightened. Their children, until the State takes them away, are so much capital, instruments of their well-being. Interest has become, especially since 1789, the sole mainspring of their ideas; it never occurs to them to consider whether an act is legal or immoral, but whether it is profitable. Morality, which must not be confounded with religion, begins with a

competence; just as, in a higher social sphere, we see delicacy begin to bloom in the soul when fortune has gilded the furniture. The man who is absolutely upright and moral is a rare exception in the peasant class. The curious will ask why. Of all the reasons that can be given for this state of things, this is the principal one: By the very nature of their social functions, the peasants live a purely material life approximating the savage state to which their constant union with nature invites them. Toil, when it crushes the body, deprives the mind of its purifying action, especially in ignorant people. In fine, the peasant's poverty is his *reason of State*, as Abbé Brossette said.

Meddling in everybody's affairs, Tonsard listened to everybody's complaints, and guided the needy in profitable frauds. The wife, a kindly person in appearance, favored the malefactors of the district with voluble speech, and never refused her approbation nor a helping hand to her customers, whatever they might do, against the *bourgeois!* So it was that in that wine-shop, a veritable nest of vipers, the hatred of the proletariat and the peasant for the wealthy and the master was kept at a white heat, active and venomous.

The happy-go-lucky life of the Tonsards set an extremely bad example. Everyone asked himself why he should not gather wood for his oven, for cooking and for keeping warm in winter, in the forest of Aigues, as the Tonsards did. Why not procure fodder for a cow as they did, and game to

eat or sell? Why not reap without sowing, at harvest-time and the grape-picking, as they did? Should the stealthy thieving that ravages the woods and levies tithes upon the fields and pastures and vineyards become general in that valley, it would speedily degenerate into a vested right in the communes of Blangy, Conches, and Cerneux, over which the domain of Aigues extended. This festering sore, for reasons which will be set forth in due time, was much more troublesome on the estate of Aigues than on those of Ronquerolles and Soulanges. Do not imagine, by the way, that Tonsard, his wife, his children, and his old mother had ever deliberately said to themselves: "We will live by theft, and we will steal skilfully!" The habit had grown upon them slowly. At first, the family mixed a little green wood with the dead wood; then, emboldened by habit and by anticipated impunity, essential to schemes that will develop in the course of this narrative, they had, in twenty years, reached a point where they procured their stock of wood and stole almost their whole *living*. The pasturage of the cows, the abuses of gleaning and *hallebotage*, likewise became established by degrees. When the family and the sluggards of the valley had once enjoyed the benefits of these four privileges won by the poor of the country districts, which went so far as pillage, it will readily be conceived that the peasants would not renounce them unless constrained thereto by a force superior to their audacity.

At the moment when this narrative begins, Tonsard was about fifty years old, a tall, powerful man, rather stout than thin, with curly black hair, complexion extremely high-colored, with purplish streaks like the veins in a brick, eyes of a yellowish tinge, flat ears with broad seams on the edges, of a muscular build, but enveloped in soft, deceitful flesh, with a retreating forehead and hanging lower lip; he concealed his real character beneath a stupidity mingled with flashes from an experience which resembled wit, the more because he had acquired in his father-in-law's society a *gouailleur* manner of speech, to employ an expression from the Vermichel and Fourchon vocabulary. His nose, flattened at the end, as if God's finger had placed its mark upon it, provided him with a voice which started from the palate, as is the case with all those whom disease has disfigured by disturbing the communication between the nasal cavities, through which the air then finds difficulty in passing. His upper teeth overlapped, and that defect, which Lavater characterizes as a most lamentable one, was the more perceptible because they were as white as a dog's teeth. Beneath the surly good-nature of the sluggard, and the free and easy manners of the country-tippler, the man would have terrified the least clear-sighted observer.

If Tonsard's portrait and his father-in-law's, and the description of his wine-shop, appear in the foreground, pray believe that that place is due to the man, the wine-shop, and the family. In the first

place, that existence, which we have explained so minutely, is the type of the existence led by a hundred other households in the valley of Aigues. Furthermore, Tonsard, although he was nothing more than the tool of the keen and deep-rooted hatred of others, wielded an enormous influence in the battle about to be fought, for he was the adviser of all the complainants of the lower classes. His wine-shop, as we shall see, was the constant rendezvous of the assailants, just as he became their leader, as a result of the terror he inspired in the valley, less by his acts than by what was always expected of him. The poacher's threats being as much dreaded as their performance, he had never had occasion to execute any one of them.

Every rebellion, open or secret, has its standard. The standard of the marauders, the do-nothings, the wine-bibbers, was the awe-inspiring pole of the *Grand-I-Vert*. There was amusement to be had there, a thing as eagerly sought for and as rare in the country as in the city. Moreover, there were no inns on a cantonal road only four leagues long, which heavily-laden wagons covered easily in three hours; so that everybody who went from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes stopped at the *Grand-I-Vert*, were it only for refreshment. The miller of Aigues, who was deputy mayor, and his workmen also frequented the place. Even the general's servants did not despise that tap-room, which was made attractive by the presence of Tonsard's daughters, so that the *Grand-I-Vert* had subterranean communication with

the château through the retainers and could find out whatever they knew. It is impossible, either by benefactions or by appealing to their selfish interests, to break the constant understanding between the servant class and the common people. The servants come from the people and remain attached to them. That deplorable good-fellowship explained the reservation implied by the last words said by Charles the footman to Blondet, on the stoop.

IV

ANOTHER IDYLL

"Ah! bless my soul! papa," said Tonsard, seeing his father-in-law come in, and suspecting that he was hungry, "your jaws are in a hurry this morning! We haven't anything to give you. And what about that rope, that rope we were going to make? It's amazing how much you make the day before and how little there is made the next day! You ought long ago to have twisted the rope that'll put an end to your life, for you're getting to cost us much too dear."

The pleasantry of the peasant and the laboring man is very Attic; it consists in speaking out his whole thought, and adding force to it by some grotesque expression. Just the same thing is done in salons. The refinement of wit replaces the picturesqueness of vulgarity, that is the whole difference.

"Never mind about your father-in-law!" said the old man; "come down to business. I want a bottle of the best."

Thus speaking, Fourchon produced a hundred-sou piece, which gleamed like a sun in his hands, and struck it upon the wretched table at which he was sitting, and to which its covering of grease imparted

as much curious interest as its black burned spots, its marks of glasses, and its numerous notches. At the sound of the money, Marie Tonsard, built like a racing corvette, bestowed upon her grandfather a piercing glance that flashed from her eyes like a spark. La Tonsard came out of her bedroom, attracted by the music of the metal.

"You're always abusing my poor father," she said to Tonsard; "but he's earned a good deal of money this year; God grant he's come honestly by it!—Let's have that," she added, pouncing on the piece of money, and snatching it out of Fourchon's hands.

"Go, Marie," said Tonsard, gravely; "there's still some wine in bottles above the shelf."

In the country the wine is all of one quality, but it is sold in two forms: wine in the cask, and wine in bottles.

"Where did you get this?" La Tonsard asked her father, slipping the coin into her pocket.

"You'll come to a bad end, Philippine," said the old man, shaking his head and making no attempt to recover his money.

Doubtless Fourchon had discovered ere this the folly of a struggle between his terrible son-in-law, his daughter, and himself.

"This makes one more bottle of wine that you sell for a hundred sous," he added, in a bitter tone; "but it'll be the last. I'll carry my custom to the Café de la Paix."

"Hold your tongue, papa," retorted the plump, fair hostess, who bore a strong resemblance to a

Roman matron; "you must have a shirt, a clean pair of trousers, another hat, and I'd like to see you wear a vest at last."

"I've already told you that would ruin me!" cried the old man. "When people think I'm rich, nobody'll give me anything."

The bottle brought by the fair-haired Marie put a stop to the eloquence of the old man, who was not lacking in the trait peculiar to those whose tongues assume the right to say anything, and who do not recoil from giving expression to any thought, however atrocious it may be.

"So you don't mean to tell us where you *scoop* so much money?" asked Tonsard. "We might go there, too!"

As he sat working on a snare, the savage *cabaretier* scrutinized his father-in-law's trousers and soon discovered the round protuberance caused by the second five-franc piece.

"Your health!—I'm getting to be a capitalist," said Père Fourchon.

"If you chose, you would be," said Tonsard; "you have ways of doing things, you have! But the devil has bored a hole in the lower part of your head that lets everything leak out!"

"Oh! I just played the otter trick on that little bourgeois from Paris, who's staying at Aigues, that's all!"

"If many people came to see the sources of the Avonne, you'd be a rich man, Papa Fourchon," said Marie.

"Yes," he replied, drinking the last glass of his bottle; "but I've fooled so much with the otters that the beasts have lost their tempers, and one of 'em flung himself between my legs as'll be worth more'n twenty francs to me."

"I'll bet, papa, that you made an otter out of flax, didn't you?" said La Tonsard, looking at her father with a cunning leer.

"If you'll give me a pair of trousers, a vest, and list suspenders, so that Vermichel needn't be too much ashamed of me on our platform at *Tivoli*,—for Père Socquard's always grumbling at me,—I'll let you keep the coin, my girl; your idea's a good one. I might catch the bourgeois from Aigues again—perhaps he's going to give his time to otters!"

"Go and get another bottle," said Tonsard to his daughter.—"If your father had an otter, he'd show her to us," he continued, addressing his wife, and trying to arouse Fourchon's pride.

"I'm too much afraid of seeing her in your frying-pan!" retorted the old man, winking one of his little green eyes, as he glanced at his daughter. "Philippine's *pinched* my money already, and I'd like to know how many times you've scared money out of me with your talk about clothing me and feeding me!—And you say my jaws are in a hurry, and I always go half naked—"

"You sold your last suit to buy mulled wine at the Café de la Paix, papa!" said La Tonsard; "I know Vermichel tried to prevent you—"

"Vermichel!—him as I treated! Vermichel ain't

capable of going back on a friend. It must 'a' been that old firkin of lard on two legs that he ain't ashamed to call his wife!"

"Him or her," said Tonsard, "or Bonnébault—"

"If it was Bonnébault," then rejoined Fourchon,—"and him one of the props of the café, I'll—I'll—Never mind!"

"Well, old toper, what if you did sell your clothes? You sold 'em because you sold 'em; you're of age!" said Tonsard, slapping the old man's knee. "Come, do honor to my casks, inflame your old gullet! *Mame* Tonsard's father has a right to do it, and it's better than carrying your small change to Socquard!"

"To think that you've been playing for people to dance at *Tivoli* these fifteen years, and never guessed the secret of Socquard's mulled wine, and you so clever!" said the daughter to her father. "And yet you know very well that with that secret we'd soon be as rich as Rigou!"

In the Morvan and in that part of Bourgogne which lies at its foot on the Paris side, this mulled wine, which La Tonsard flung in Père Fourchon's face, is a rather dear beverage which plays a great part in the life of the peasants, and is prepared with more or less skill by grocers, or by keepers of cafés where cafés exist. This blessed beverage, compounded of choice wine, sugar, cinnamon, and other spices, is preferable to all the disguised or adulterated forms of *eau-de-vie* known as ratafia, *cent-sept-ans*, *eau-des-braves*, *cassis*, *vespétro*, *esprit-de-soleil*, etc. Mulled wine is found as far east as the boundary between France

and Switzerland. In the Jura, in the wild regions to which some few enthusiastic tourists find their way, the innkeepers, on the word of travelling salesmen, give the name of Syracuse wine to that manufactured product, an excellent drink, by the way, for which you are delighted to pay three or four francs a bottle under the spur of the canine thirst caused by ascending mountain peaks. In the households of the Morvan and Bourgogne, the slightest twinge of pain, the most trivial shock to the nerves, is an excuse for a draught of mulled wine. The women, before, during, and after their confinement, take sugared toast with it. Mulled wine has devoured many peasant fortunes. More than once, too, the seductive fluid has necessitated marital chastisement.

"It ain't possible!" replied Fourchon. "Socquard always shuts himself up to make his mulled wine! He never told his dead wife the secret. He gets all the stuff for it from Paris."

"Don't worry your father!" cried Tonsard. "If he don't know—why, he don't know! A man can't know everything!"

Fourchon became very uneasy when he saw his son-in-law's expression grow milder, as well as his words.

"What do you want to rob me of now?" said the old man, ingenuously.

"Everything's strictly legitimate about my fortune," said Tonsard, "and when I take anything from you, I am paying myself the dowry you promised me."

Fourchon, reassured by this brutality, hung his head like a man convinced and beaten.

"There's a pretty snare," continued Tonsard, walking up to his father-in-law and laying the snare on his knee; "they'll need game at Aigues, and we'll make out to sell 'em some of their own, or else there's no good Lord for us poor folks!"

"Stout work," said the old man, examining the engine of evil.

"Let us pick up sous as we can, papa," said La Tonsard, "we'll have our slice of the Aigues cake!"

"Oh! the chatterers!" said Tonsard. "If I'm ever hanged, it won't be for a rifle-shot, but for a shot from your daughter's tongue!"

"So you think Aigues will be sold in lots for your miserable noses, do you?" rejoined Fourchon. "What! here Père Rigou's been sucking the marrow out of your bones this thirty year and you ain't found out yet that the bourgeois will be worse than the nobles. At that business, my chicks, the Soudrys and Gaubertins and Rigous will make you dance to the tune of *I've good tobacco and you shall have none!*—the national tune of the rich, you know! A peasant'll always be a peasant! Don't you see—but then, you don't know anything about politics!—don't you see that the government has put all these taxes on wine just to cheat us out of our *blunt* and keep us poor? The bourgeois and the government's all one. What would become of them if we were all rich? Would they plough their fields? would they get in their crops?—They've got to have some poor

devils under 'em! I was rich for ten years, and I know what I thought about beggars!"

"We must hunt with 'em, all the same," replied Tonsard, "as they mean to lot out the big estates, and we'll turn against Rigou afterward. If I'd been in Courtecuisse's place, who's being devoured by him, I'd have settled his account long ago with other balls than what the poor fellow gives him."

"You're right," said Fourchon. "As Père Niseron said, when he kept on being a republican after everybody else had quit: 'The common people have a hard life; but they don't die; they have time on their side!'"

Fourchon fell into a sort of reverie, and Tonsard took advantage of it to take his snare; but, as he did so, he made a hole in the trousers with his scissors, while Père Fourchon was raising his glass to drink, and placed his foot on the hundred-sou piece which fell on the part of the floor where the ground was always damp, as the drinkers emptied their glasses there. Although dexterously performed, the operation would probably have been detected by the old man, had it not been for the arrival of Vermichel.

"Tonsard, d'ye know where papa is?" asked the official from the foot of the steps.

Vermichel's call, the theft of the money, and the emptying of the glass took place simultaneously.

"Present, captain!" said Père Fourchon, offering Vermichel his hand to assist him in ascending the wine-shop steps.

Of all Burgundian faces, Vermichel's would have

seemed to you the most Burgundian. The *praticien* was not red, but scarlet. His face, like certain tropical portions of the globe, burst out at several points in little extinct volcanoes, marking the limits of those flat, green, mossy surfaces which Fourchon poetically called *flowers of wine*. That fiery face, whose features were immeasurably bloated by constant debauches, seemed of Cyclopean size, illuminated on the right side by a flashing eye, darkened on the other side by a yellow patch over the eye. Red hair always in disorder, and a beard like Judas's, made Vermichel as formidable in appearance as he was mild in reality. His trumpet-shaped nose resembled an interrogation point, to which his extremely capacious mouth seemed always to be replying, even when it was not open. Vermichel was short of stature, he wore hob-nailed shoes, trousers of bottle-green velvet, an old waistcoat patched with divers stuffs, which seemed to have been made from a counterpane, a jacket of coarse blue cloth, and a broad-brimmed gray hat. That luxurious garb, required by the town of Soulanges, where he performed the diverse functions of porter at the Hôtel de Ville, drummer, jailer, fiddler, and *praticien*, was kept in condition by Madame Vermichel, a doughty antagonist of the Rabelaisian philosophy. That virago with moustaches, who was a yard wide, weighed a hundred and twenty kilogrammes and still was light of foot, had established her dominion over Vermichel, who, being beaten by her when he was drunk, allowed her to have her way

when he was sober. So it was that Père Fourchon used to say, referring contemptuously to Vermichel's costume: "It's the livery of a slave!"

"When you speak of the sun, you see his rays," said Fourchon, repeating a joke inspired by Vermichel's bright red face, which did, in fact, resemble the golden suns painted on the sign-posts of provincial inns. "Did *Mame* Vermichel spy too much dust on your back, that you run away from your better four-fifths, for you can't call that woman your better half? What brings you here so early, old beaten drum?"

"Politics again!" replied Vermichel, evidently accustomed to these jests.

"Aha! business is bad at Blangy; we're going to protest some notes, eh?" said Père Fourchon, pouring out a glass of wine for his friend.

"But our monkey is at my heels," said Vermichel, lifting his elbow.

In workman's slang, *monkey* means master. The expression was a part of the Vermichel-Fourchon dictionary.

"What the devil does *M'sieur* Brunet come bothering round here for?" asked Tonsard.

"Oh! *pardi*," said Vermichel, "you people have brought him in more'n you're worth these last three years. Ah! the bourgeois of Aigues is playing a pretty game on your ribs!—He's doing well, innkeeper.—As Père Brunet says: 'If there was three landholders like him in the valley, my fortune would be made!'"

"What new scheme have they thought up against the poor folks?" said Marie.

"Faith," replied Vermichel, "it ain't so bad, I tell you! and you'll end by giving in.—What do you expect? here for two years past they've been in great force, with three keepers, one keeper on horseback, all as busy as ants, and a rural guard, who's a terrible fellow. And then, too, the gendarmerie get under arms for 'em now on every occasion.—They'll crush you—"

"Will they, though," said Tonsard, "we're too flat. The grass holds out longer against the wind than the tree."

"Don't trust to that," said Père Fourchon to his son-in-law; "you've got property—"

"After all," continued Vermichel, "they're very fond of you, those people are, for they think of nothing but you from morning till night! They said to themselves like this: 'Their cattle are feeding in our pastures; we'll just go and seize their cattle; they can't eat the grass in our pastures themselves.' As you've all been convicted, they told our *monkey* to seize your cows. We shall begin this morning at Conches, there we're going to seize Mère Bonnébault's cow, La Godin's, La Mitant's—"

As soon as she heard the name of Bonnébault, Marie, who was the sweetheart of Bonnébault, the grandson of the old woman with the cow, slipped out into the vineyard, after exchanging a glance with her father and mother. She glided like an

eel through a hole in the hedge, and ran toward Conches with the speed of a hunted hare.

"They'll do so much," observed Tonsard, calmly, "that they'll be getting their bones broken, and that would be a pity, their mothers won't make 'em new ones."

"That may be, all the same," said Père Fourchon.—"But, look ye, Vermichel, I can't be with you for an hour yet; I've got some important business at the château."

"More important than three jobs of five sous? 'You mustn't spit on the harvest,' as Papa Noah said."

"I tell you, Vermichel, that my business calls me to the château of Aigues," repeated old Fourchon, assuming a ridiculous air of importance.

"Anyway, even if it didn't," said Tonsard, "my father would do well to get out of the way. Does it happen that you would like to find the cows?"

"Monsieur Brunet, who's a good fellow, asks nothing better than to find only their dung," replied Vermichel. "A man who has to travel round at night as he does, has to be prudent."

"If he is prudent, he's very wise," said Tonsard, dryly.

"So he says to Monsieur Michaud like this," continued Vermichel: "'I'll go as soon as court adjourns.' If he wanted to find cows, he'd have gone to-morrow at seven o'clock. But Monsieur Brunet will have to go, you know. You can't catch Michaud twice, he's a cunning bloodhound. Ah! what a brigand!"

"Bullies like him ought to stay in the army," said Tonsard; "they're good for nothing but to set onto the enemy. I'd like to have him ask me my name; it's no use for him to say he's a veteran of the Young Guard, I'm sure that after we'd measured our spurs, I'd have more feathers in my claws than he would."

"Look here," said La Tonsard to Vermichel, "when shall we see the posters of the Soulanges fête? Here it is the eighth of August."

"I carried them to Monsieur Bournier at Ville-aux-Fayes yesterday to be printed," Vermichel replied. "They're talking at *Mame* Soudry's of having fireworks on the lake."

"What a crowd we shall have!" cried Fourchon.

"Those will be great days for Socquard!" said the keeper of the wine-shop, in an envious tone.

"Oh, yes! if it don't rain!" added his wife, as if to console herself.

They heard a horse trotting along the road from Soulanges, and, five minutes later, the bailiff fastened his steed to a post placed for that purpose at the gate used by the cows; then he showed his head at the door of the *Grand-I-Vert*.

"Well, well, my children, let's not lose any time," he said, pretending to be in a great hurry.

"You have a rebel here, Monsieur Brunet. Père Fourchon has the gout" (*goutte*).

"He has had several drops" (*gouttes*), replied the bailiff, "but the law doesn't require him to be thirsty."

"Your pardon, Monsieur Brunet," said Fourchon, "they expect me at Aigues on business; we're bargaining for an otter."

Brunet, a small, thin man, dressed all in black, with a bilious complexion, tawny eye, curly hair, tightly-closed lips, thin nose, restless manner, and hoarse voice, presented the unusual phenomenon of a countenance, a bearing, and a disposition in harmony with his profession. He was so well acquainted with the law, or, to speak more accurately, with legal quibbles, that he was at once the terror and the counsellor of the whole canton: nor did he lack a certain popularity among the peasants, whom he asked, most of the time, to pay him in what they raised. All his active and negative qualities, and his tact in that particular, secured for him the clientage of the canton, to the exclusion of his confrère, Maître Plissoud, of whom we shall hear more later. It not infrequently happens, in the bailiwicks of justices of the peace in the rural districts, that there is one bailiff who does everything and another who does nothing.

"Things are getting warm, eh?" said Tonsard to little Père Brunet.

"What do you expect! you're robbing the man too freely! he must defend himself," replied the bailiff. "Things will turn out badly for you all around; the government will take a hand in it."

"Is there nothing for us poor people to do but die, then?" said La Tonsard, offering the bailiff a small glass on a saucer.

"The poor can die all they want to, the supply won't ever fail," said Fourchon, sententiously.

"You cut into the wood altogether too much!" said the bailiff.

"Don't you believe it, Monsieur Brunet; my word, they make a lot of noise about a few wretched bundles of sticks!" rejoined La Tonsard.

"They didn't shave off enough rich people's heads during the Revolution, that's the whole of it," observed Tonsard.

At that moment, they heard a noise, horrible in that it was inexplicable. The wild rush of two feet mingled with the clashing of weapons drowned the rustling of leaves and branches dragged along by footsteps even more hurried. Two voices, as different as the two gaits, were uttering noisy exclamations. Everybody in the wine-shop divined the approach of a man in pursuit of a fleeing woman; but what had happened?—The uncertainty did not last long.

"It's the mother," said Tonsard, rising, "I know her voice!"

And suddenly, having climbed the wretched steps of the *Grand-I-Vert* with a supreme exertion of energy of which no calves but those of smugglers are capable, old Mother Tonsard fell into the room with her heels in the air. The immense mass of wood in her bundle made a terrible noise as it struck against the upper part of the door and the floor. Everybody got out of the way. The tables, chairs, and bottles within reach of the branches were thrown

all about. The crash would not have been so great if the hovel had fallen down.

"I'm dead this time! the blackguard's killed me!"

The words, the actions, and the flight of the old woman were explained by the appearance in the doorway of a guard in a full suit of green broadcloth, with a silver clasp on his hat, a sabre at his side, a leather bandoleer with the arms of Montcornet and the arms of Troisville in the centre, the regulation red waistcoat, and leather gaiters reaching above the knee.

After a moment's hesitation, the keeper said, as he caught sight of Brunet and Vermichel:

"I have witnesses."

"To what?" demanded Tonsard.

"That woman has a ten years' oak cut in small pieces in her bundle—a downright crime!"

Vermichel, as soon as the word *witnesses* was mentioned, thought it best to go into the vineyard for a breath of air.

"What's that! what's that!" said Tonsard, taking his place in front of the guard, while his wife was helping her mother-in-law to rise; "will you be good enough to show me your heels, Vatel? Do your talking and seize property on the road, you're at home there, brigand! but get out of here. My house is my own, I believe! A man is master in his own house."

"I caught your mother in the act, she must go with me."

"Arrest my mother in my house? You haven't

the right to do it. My house is inviolable, I know that, if I don't know anything else. Have you got a warrant from Monsieur Guerbet, our magistrate? Aha! you'll need the law to get in here. You're not the law, although you did take your oath in court that you'd starve us to death, you low-minded spy!"

The keeper was in such a paroxysm of rage that he tried to seize the bundle, but the old woman, a ghastly sheet of black parchment endowed with movement, whose like can be seen only in David's picture of the Sabine Women, yelled at him:

"Don't touch it, or I'll claw your eyes out!"

"Very well, I dare you to take the bundle apart in Monsieur Brunet's presence," said the guard.

Although the bailiff affected the air of indifference which familiarity with such affairs gives to officers of the law, he bestowed upon the innkeeper and his wife a wink which signified: "This is a bad business!"—Old Fourchon, for his part, called his daughter's attention, by pointing with his finger to the pile of ashes in the fireplace. La Tonsard, understanding from that meaning gesture both her mother-in-law's peril and her father's advice, took up a handful of the ashes and threw them in the guard's eyes. Vatel roared; Tonsard, enlightened by the light the guard lost, pushed him roughly down the wretched outer steps, upon which it was so easy for a blinded man's feet to go astray that Vatel measured his length in the road and dropped his gun. In a twinkling the bundle of wood was taken apart, the green wood removed and hidden with a

celerity which no words can describe. Brunet, not choosing to be a witness of that operation, which he anticipated would take place, rushed out to help the guard to rise, seated him on the banking, and went and dipped his handkerchief in water to bathe the eyes of the victim, who, despite his suffering, tried to drag himself to the brook.

"You are wrong, Vatel," said the bailiff, "you haven't any right to enter houses, you know—"

The little old woman, almost a hunchback, emitted as many flashes of fire from her eyes as insults from her toothless, foaming mouth, as she stood in the doorway, with arms akimbo, shrieking loud enough to be heard at Blangy:

"Ah! you blackguard, well done! May hell blast you!—Suspect me of cutting trees! and me the honestest woman in the village—and hunt me like a vile beast! I'd like to see you lose your cursed eyes, then the country'd have some peace. You all bring bad luck, you and your like, who imagine horrors to keep the war alive between your master and us!"

The guard allowed the bailiff to bathe his eyes, who, while doing so, continued to demonstrate that, as a matter of law, the sufferer was reprehensible.

"The beggar! she stirred us all up," said Vatel, at last; "she's been in the woods since last night."

Everybody having taken a hand at concealing the newly-cut tree, things were promptly restored to their usual state in the wine-shop; Tonsard thereupon came to the door with a surly face.

"Vatel, my boy, if you take it into your head to violate my domicile again," he said, "my gun will talk to you; to-day you have had ashes; another day you may see fire.—You don't know your trade. You must be warm after it all; if you want a glass of wine, come and take it; you can see that my mother's bundle didn't have a twig of suspicious wood; it's all underbrush."

"Hound!" muttered the guard to the bailiff, his pride smarting more painfully under that sarcasm than his eyes had done with the ashes.

At that moment, Charles, the footman, recently sent in quest of Blondet, appeared at the door of the *Grand-I-Vert*.

"What's the matter with you, Vatel?" he asked the guard.

"Ah!" replied the guard, wiping his eyes, which he had plunged wide open into the brook, to complete the operation of cleansing them, "I have some debtors in there whom I will make curse the day they were born."

"If that's the way you feel, Monsieur Vatel," said Tonsard, coldly, "you'll find out that we know a thing or two in Bourgogne!"

Vatel disappeared. A little curious to learn the solution of the enigma, Charles looked into the cabaret.

"Come to the château, you and your otter, if you have one," he said to Père Fourchon.

The old man rose hurriedly and followed Charles.

"Well, where's your otter?" queried Charles, with a sceptical smile.

"This way," said the old ropemaker, going toward the Thune.

That is the name of the brook supplied by the overflow of the mill-pond and the streams in the park of Aigues. The Thune skirts the cantonal road as far as the little lake of Soulanges, which it flows through, and, after furnishing water for the mills and streams of the château of Soulanges, finds its way into the Avonne.

"There she is, I hid her in the Aigues stream, with a stone round her neck."

As he stooped and rose again, the old man missed the hundred-sou piece from his pocket, where coins so seldom dwelt that he was certain to notice when it was empty as quickly as when it was full.

"Ah! the blackguards!" he cried, "when I hunt otter, they hunt their father-in-law!—They take away all I earn, and say it's for my good! Ah! indeed, much they care for my good! If it wa'n't for my poor Mouche, who's the comfort of my old age, I'd go and drown myself. Children are the ruination of fathers.—You ain't married, are you, Monsieur Charles? Don't you ever get married; then you won't have to blame yourself for sowing bad seed. And I thought I was going to buy some flax—good-bye, flax! That gentleman, who *is* a gentleman, gave me ten francs; well, well, my otter's gone up in price now."

Charles was so suspicious of Père Fourchon, that he took his lamentations, which on that occasion were sincere enough, as a preparation for what, in

servants' hall parlance, he called a *whopper*, and he made the mistake of allowing his opinion to appear in a smile, which the cunning old fellow detected.

"Look here, Père Fourchon, straighten up now! you're going to talk with madame," said Charles, noticing a goodly supply of vinous flush on the old man's nose and cheeks.

"I know what I'm about, Charles; and to prove it, if you'll treat me in the pantry to the remains of the breakfast and a bottle or two of Spanish wine, I'll say three words to you that will save you a *dance*."

"Say them, and François will have monsieur's order to give you a glass of wine," replied the footman.

"Is it agreed?"

"Agreed."

"Well, you chatted with my granddaughter Catherine, under the arch of Avonne bridge; Godain's in love with her; he's seen you and he's fool enough to be jealous. I say 'fool enough,' because a peasant ought not to have feelings that only the rich are allowed to have. So if you go to *Tivoli* to dance with her the day of the fête at Soulanges, you'll dance more'n you like!—Godain's stingy and ugly; he's quite capable of breaking your arm without giving you a chance at him."

"That comes too high! Catherine's a pretty girl, but she isn't worth that," said Charles. "Why in the deuce does Godain lose his temper? Others don't."

"Oh! he wants to marry her."

"There's a girl who will be well beaten!" said Charles.

"That depends," said the old man; "she takes after her mother, and Tonsard never raised his hand to her, he's so afraid of seeing her raise her foot. A woman who knows how to take care of herself is a good investment. And I tell you if he tries it on with Catherine, strong as he is, Godain won't have the last word."

"Here's forty sous to drink my health, Père Fourchon, in case we can't get a drop of Alicante."

Père Fourchon turned away his head as he pocketed the coin, so that Charles could not see the expression of satisfaction and irony that he could not repress.

"Catherine's a proud slut," he rejoined; "she likes good Malaga, and you ought to tell her to come to Aigues and get some, you fool!"

Charles gazed at Père Fourchon in artless admiration, unable to divine the immense interest the general's enemies had in insinuating another spy into the château.

"The general must be happy, ain't he?" inquired the old man; "the peasants are very quiet now. What does he say? is he still satisfied with Sibilet?"

"Monsieur Michaud's the only one who bothers Monsieur Sibilet; they say he'll have him dismissed."

"Jealousy of the trade!" rejoined Fourchon. "I'll bet you'd like to see François discharged and get his place as first *valet de chambre*."

"Gad, he has twelve hundred francs a year," said Charles; "but they can't discharge him, he knows the general's secrets."

"Just the same as *Mame* Michaud knows *Mame* la comtesse's," replied Fourchon, looking Charles squarely in the eye. "Say, my boy, do you know whether môsieu and madame have a room apiece?"

"*Parbleu!* if they didn't, monsieur wouldn't be so fond of madame," said Charles.

"Is that all you know about it?" queried Fourchon.

At that point their conversation ceased, for they were in front of the kitchen windows.

V

THE ENEMIES FACE TO FACE

At the beginning of breakfast, François, the first *valet de chambre*, said to Blondet in an undertone, but loud enough for the count to hear:

"Monsieur, Père Fourchon's little one says that they finally caught an otter, and wants to know if you want it, before he takes it to the sub-prefect at Ville-aux-Fayes."

Emile Blondet, past-master in mystification though he was, could not help blushing like a maiden who hears a somewhat equivocal anecdote, the secret meaning of which is known to her.

"Aha! so you have been hunting otter with Père Fourchon this morning!" exclaimed the general, laughing uproariously.

"What's that?" asked the countess, disturbed by her husband's laughter.

"When a bright man like him," rejoined the general, "has allowed himself to be taken in by Père Fourchon, a retired cuirassier has no reason to blush for having hunted that same otter, which bears an extraordinary resemblance to the third

horse which the post always makes you pay for and which you never see."

In the midst of a fresh explosion of wild merriment, the general succeeded in saying:

"I am no longer surprised that you changed your boots and trousers; of course you went in swimming. For my part, I didn't go so far as you in the mystification, I stayed on the water's edge; but, then, you know much more than I do—"

"You forget, my dear," observed Madame de Montcornet, "that I don't know what you are talking about."

At those words, uttered with an injured air due to Blondet's embarrassment, the general became serious, and Blondet himself told the story of his otter-fishing.

"But, if they really have an otter," said the countess, "the poor people are not so much to blame."

"True; but it's ten years since they saw an otter," retorted the pitiless general.

"Monsieur le comte," said François, "the little one swears by all the gods that he has one."

"If they have one, I'll buy it of them," said the general.

"God cannot have doomed Aigues never to have any more otters," observed Abbé Brossette.

"Ah! monsieur le curé," cried Blondet, "if you set God loose on me—"

"Who has come?" asked the countess, hastily.

"Mouche, madame, the little fellow who always goes about with Père Fourchon," replied the valet.

"Send him in—if madame consents?" said the general; "perhaps he will amuse you."

"At all events, we must find out what to expect," said the countess.

Mouche appeared a few moments later, almost naked. At sight of that personification of indigence standing in that dining-room, a single one of whose pier-glasses would have sold for a sum that would have been a fortune to that barefooted, barelegged, bareheaded, barebreasted child, it was impossible not to yield to the inspirations of charity. Mouche's eyes, like two burning coals, gazed from the magnificent appointments of the room to those of the table.

"Have you no mother, pray?" asked Madame de Montcornet, unable to conceive any other explanation of such dilapidation.

"No, madame; m'ma died o' grief because she never saw p'pa again after he went into the army in 1812, without marryin' her *with the papers*, and was froze to death, by your leave. But I have my grand-p'pa Fourchon, he's a very good man, if he does beat me sometimes like a Jesus."

"How does it happen, my dear, that there are such wretched people on your estate?" said the countess, looking at the general.

"Madame la comtesse," said the curé, "in this commune we have none but voluntary misery. Monsieur le comte means well; but we have to do with people of no religion, who have but a single thought: to live at your expense."

"But, my dear curé," said Blondet, "you are here to teach them morality."

"Monsieur," Abbé Brossette replied, "Monseigneur sent me here as a missionary among savages; but, as I have had the honor to tell him, the savages of France are inaccessible; it is a law among them not to listen to us, but we can interest the savages of America."

"M'sieu le curé, they still help me a little; but if I was to go to your church, they wouldn't help me none at all, and they'd whack me over the head."

"Religion should begin by giving him a pair of trousers, my dear abbé," said Blondet. "In your missionary work, don't you begin by coddling the savages?"

"He would soon sell his clothes," the abbé replied, in a low tone, "and I haven't a salary that permits me to do that sort of thing."

"Monsieur le curé is right," said the general, with a glance at Mouche.

The little rascal's policy consisted in pretending not to understand a word of what was said when he was at a disadvantage.

"The little rascal's intelligence is proof that he knows good from evil," said the general. "He's old enough to work, and he thinks of nothing but committing impudent misdemeanors. He is well known to the keepers.—Before I was mayor, he knew enough to know that a landowner who is witness of an offence on his own estates cannot testify to it; he stayed in my pastures with his cows in the

most insolent way, never troubling himself to go when he saw me, whereas now he runs away."

"Ah! that is very bad," said the countess; "you mustn't take what belongs to other people, my little friend."

"We must eat, madame; my grandp'pa gives me more blows than bread, and that makes the stomach hollow, to get such whacks! When the cows are milking, I milk them a little and that keeps me up. Is monseigneur so poor that he can't let me drink a little of his grass?"

"Perhaps he has had nothing to eat to-day," said the countess, touched by such utter destitution. "Give him some bread and what is left of the chicken—in fact, let him breakfast!" she added, speaking to the valet.—"Where do you sleep?"

"Anywhere that they'll let us sleep in winter, madame, and in the open air when the weather's fine."

"How old are you?"

"Twelve years old."

"Why, there is still time to start him on the right path," said the countess to her husband.

"He will make a soldier," said the general, roughly; "he is well prepared. I suffered quite as much as he, and look at me!"

"Excuse me, general," said the child, "I ain't on the list, I sha'n't be drawn in the lot. My poor mother, who wa'n't married, laid in the fields. I'm a son of the soil, as grandp'pa says. M'ma has saved me from the army. My name ain't Mouche any more'n

'tis anything else. Grandp'pa's told me all my *advantages;* I ain't been put on the government papers, and when I'm old enough to be drafted I'll just make the tour of France! they won't catch me."

"Do you love your grandfather?" said the countess, trying to read what was written in that heart of twelve years.

"*Dame!* he cuffs me about well when he feels that way; but what's the odds! he's so amusin'! such a good fellow! And then he says he's takin' his pay for teachin' me to read and write."

"Do you know how to read?" said the count.

"Why, yes, o' course, m'sieu le comte, and fine writin', too! just as true as we have an otter!"

"What does that say?" asked the count, handing him the newspaper.

"*La Cu-o-tidienne,*" replied Mouche, hesitating only three times.

Everybody, even Abbé Brossette, began to laugh.

"See here, you make me read the newspaper," cried Mouche, in a rage. "My grandp'pa says they're only made for the rich, and we always know, sometime or other, what there is in 'em."

"The child is right, general; he makes me long to see my victorious opponent of this morning once more," said Blondet. "I see that the trick he played me was *mouchified.*"

Mouche understood perfectly that he was on exhibition for the entertainment of the bourgeois; thereupon Père Fourchon's pupil showed himself worthy of his master—he began to weep.

"How can you make fun of a child who goes about barefooted?" said the countess.

"And who thinks it perfectly natural that his grandfather should reimburse himself in blows for the expense of his education," said Blondet.

"Tell me, my poor little fellow, have you caught an otter?" said the countess.

"Yes, madame, as true as you're the loveliest lady I ever saw or ever shall see," said the child, wiping his eyes.

"Show us the otter, then," said the general.

"Oh! m'sieu le comte, grandp'pa hid her; but she was still kickin' when we were at our rope-walk. You can send for my grandp'pa, for he wants to sell her himself."

"Take him to the buttery," said the countess to François; "let him have his breakfast there while we wait for Père Fourchon, whom you will send Charles to fetch. See if you can find some shoes and a jacket and trousers for the child. Those who come here naked ought to go away clothed."

"God bless you, my dear lady!" said Mouche, as he left the room. "M'sieu le curé may be sure that, as long as the clothes come from you, I'll keep them for holidays."

Emile and Madame de Montcornet looked at each other, amazed at that pertinent speech, and seemed to say to the curé, with a glance: "He's not such a fool, after all!"

"Certainly, madame," said the curé, when the child had gone, "we ought not to argue with

poverty; I think that it has hidden motives which God alone is qualified to judge, physical motives often fatal, and moral motives due to character or produced by tendencies which we accuse, and which sometimes are the result of qualities from which, unluckily for society, there is no escape. The miracles accomplished on the battle-field have taught us that the most abandoned villains may be transformed into heroes.—But your situation here is exceptional, and if your benevolence is not accompanied by reflection, you run the risk of having to settle with your enemies."

"Our enemies?" cried the countess.

"Bitter enemies!" rejoined the general, gravely.

"Père Fourchon and his son-in-law Tonsard," continued the curé, "monopolize the intelligence of the lower class of people in the valley; they are consulted on the most trivial matters. Those fellows exhibit an incredible machiavelism. Understand that ten peasants assembled in a wine-shop are the small change of a great politician—"

At that moment, François entered, announcing Monsieur Sibilet.

"The Minister of Finance," said the general, with a smile; "show him in.—He will make the gravity of the question clear to you," he added, glancing at his wife and Blondet.

"Especially as he is not in the habit of keeping anything back," said the curé, in an undertone.

A moment later, Blondet saw the personage of whom he had heard ever since his arrival, and

whose acquaintance he was anxious to make, the steward of Aigues. He saw a man of medium height, about thirty years old, possessed of a churlish manner and a disagreeable face, ill-adapted to laughter. Beneath a thoughtful brow, eyes of a changing green avoided each other, thus disguising the thought. Sibilet was dressed in a brown redingote, black waistcoat and trousers, and his hair was long and straight, giving him a clerical look. The trousers imperfectly concealed the fact that he was knock-kneed. Although his sallow complexion and flabby cheeks might lead one to believe that he was of a sickly constitution, Sibilet enjoyed robust health. The tone of his voice, which was a little low, harmonized with his unflattering exterior.

Blondet secretly glanced at Abbé Brossette, and the young priest's answering glance informed the journalist that his suspicions concerning the steward were a certainty in the curé's mind.

"Haven't you estimated what the peasants steal from us at a fourth part of the income, my dear Sibilet?" queried the general.

"At much more, monsieur le comte," replied the steward. "Your poor people take more from you than the State asks you to pay. A little rascal like Mouche gleans his two bushels a day; and the old women, whom you would take to be at death's door, find health and youth and agility when gleaning time comes.—You can witness that phenomenon," he continued, addressing Blondet; "for in six days

the harvest, which has been delayed by the heavy rains in July, will begin.—The rye is to be cut next week. Nobody has a right to glean without a certificate of poverty from the mayor of the commune; and the communes ought not to allow any but poor people to glean on their territory; but the different communes of a canton glean on each other's territory without certificates. If we have sixty paupers in the commune, forty lazy fellows will join them. In fact, even people who are well provided leave their occupations to glean in the grain-fields and vineyards. Here those people pick up three hundred bushels a day, and as the harvest lasts fifteen days, that makes forty-five hundred bushels that are carried off in the canton. So the gleaning amounts to more than the tithe. As for the illegal pasturing of cows, that cuts off about a sixth of the product of our pastures. When you come to the woods, the loss is incalculable; they have got to the point where they cut down trees six years old.—The loss to you, monsieur le comte, amounts to twenty-odd thousand francs a year."

"You hear, madame!" said the general to the countess.

"Is it not an exaggerated statement?" asked Madame de Montcornet.

"Unfortunately, no, madame," replied the curé. "Poor Père Niseron, the old gray-headed man who combines the functions of bell-ringer, beadle, gravedigger, sacristan, and chorister, notwithstanding his republican opinions, in short, the grandfather of little

Geneviève, whom you found a place for with Madame Michaud—"

"La Péchina!" Sibilet interrupted.

"What's that! La Péchina? what do you mean?" asked the countess.

"Madame la comtesse, when you found Geneviève on the road in such a wretched plight, you exclaimed in Italian: *Piccina!* That word became her sobriquet, and has been so thoroughly corrupted, that the whole commune to-day calls your protégée La Péchina," said the curé. "The poor child is the only one who comes to church, with Madame Michaud and Madame Sibilet."

"And she doesn't enjoy it overmuch!" said the steward. "They ill-treat her, and taunt her with her religion."

"Well, that poor old man of seventy-two picks up, honestly too, about a bushel and a half a day," continued the curé; "but his strict probity prevents his selling what he gleans, as all the others do; he keeps it for his own use. As a favor to me, Monsieur Langlumé, your deputy, grinds his grain for nothing, and my cook bakes his bread with mine."

"I had forgotten my little protégée," said the countess, alarmed by Sibilet's remark.—"Your coming," she continued, turning to Blondet, "has turned my head. But after breakfast we will go together to the Avonne gate, and I will show you in the flesh one of the women's faces that were invented by the painters of the fifteenth century."

At that moment, Père Fourchon, escorted by François, dropped his broken wooden shoes with a crash at the door of the buttery. The countess bowed when François announced him, and Père Fourchon, attended by Mouche, with his mouth full, appeared in the doorway, holding his otter in his hand by a string attached to its yellow, star-shaped, webbed paws. He cast upon the four persons sitting at the table and upon Sibilet the suspicious, servile glance that the peasant uses as a veil, and waved the amphibious creature triumphantly in the air.

"There she is!" he said, addressing Blondet.

"My otter!" observed the Parisian, "for I certainly paid for it."

"Oh! my dear môsieu, yours got away!" retorted Père Fourchon. "At this moment she's in her hole, ain't left it since, for she was a female, instead of a male like this one!—Mouche saw him coming 'way off, when you'd gone. As true as môsieu le comte covered himself with glory with his cuirassiers at Waterloo, the otter's mine, as Aigues is môsieu le général's. But, for twenty francs, the otter's yours, or I'll carry him to our sub-prefect. If Môsieu Gourdon thinks the price is too high, I'll give you the first chance, môsieu le Parisien; as we hunted together this morning, you ought to have it."

"Twenty francs?" remarked Blondet. "In good French, you can hardly call that *giving* me first chance."

"Oh! my dear môsieu," cried the old man, "I know so little about French that I'd just as soon ask

for 'em in Burgundian, if you want; so long as I get 'em, it's all one to me, and I'll talk Latin: *latinus, latina, latinum!* After all, it's what you promised me this morning. Besides, my children have already taken the money you gave me, and I was crying about it as I came along. Ask Charles.—I don't want to prosecute 'em for ten francs and publish their names in court. As soon as I have a few sous, they get me to drinking and steal 'em from me.—It's pretty hard to be driven to go and get a glass somewhere else than my own daughter's! But that's the way it is with children to-day! That's what we got by the Revolution; it's all for the children now, the fathers are put down! Ah! I'm bringing Mouche up altogether different; he loves me, the little beggar!" he said, administering a cuff to his grandson.

"It seems to me that you're making a little thief of him, like the rest," said Sibilet, "for he never goes to bed without a crime on his conscience."

"Ah! Môsieu Sibilet, his conscience is tranquiller than yours.—Poor child! what does he take, I'd like to know? A bit of grass; that's better'n starving a man! *Dame!* he don't know mathematics like you, he don't even know subtraction, addition, and multiplication.—You do us a deal o' harm, you know! You say we're a lot of brigands, and you're the cause of the trouble between our lord and master here, who's a good man, and us folks, who are good people too! And there ain't a better country than this. Look here! do we have stock in the

Funds? don't I go about naked, as you might say, and Mouche too? We sleep in fine sheets, washed every morning by the dew, and unless you begrudge us the air we breathe and the sunbeams we drink, I don't see what you can want to take away from us!—The bourgeois steal in the chimney-corner, that pays better'n pickin' up what drops at the corner of the forest. There ain't no gamekeepers nor keepers on horseback for Môsieu Gaubertin, who came here naked as a worm and is worth two millions to-day! It's easy to say: 'Robbers!' Père Guerbet, the tax-collector at Soulanges, has been going about our villages at night this fifteen year with what he's collected, and no one ever asked him for two sous. That ain't the way they do in a country of thieves! Thieving don't make us very rich. Just tell me whether it's us or you bourgeois that has enough to live on without doing anything?"

"If you had worked, you would have property," said the curé. "God blesses toil."

"I don't mean to give you the lie, môsieu l'abbé, for you know more'n I do, and perhaps you can explain this. Here I am, ain't I? the sluggard, the do-nothing, the sot, the good-for-nothing Père Fourchon, who's had an education, who's been a farmer, who's tumbled into hard luck and hasn't picked himself up!—Well, what difference is there 'twixt me and Père Niseron, the worthy, honest man, a vinedresser seventy year old, for he's as old as I am, who's dug up the earth for sixty year, got up every morning

before daylight to go to work and made himself a body of iron and a beautiful soul? For all I can see, he's as poor as me. La Péchina, his granddaughter, works for *Mame* Michaud, while my little Mouche is free as air! So you see the goodman's rewarded for his virtue just the same way I'm punished for my vices. He don't know what a glass of wine is, he's sober as an apostle; he buries the dead, and I play for the living to dance. He's worked and starved; and I've frisked about like a merry imp of Satan. Each of us is as far advanced as the other, we have the same snow on our heads, the same property in our pockets, and I supply the rope for him to ring the bell. He's a republican, and I ain't even a publican. There you have it. The peasant may lead a good life or a bad life, according to your way of looking at it; he goes as he came, in rags, and you in fine linen!"

No one interrupted Père Fourchon, whose eloquence was evidently due to bottled wine; at first, Sibilet attempted to cut him short, but a gesture from Blondet imposed silence on the steward. The curé, the general, and the countess understood from the writer's expression that he wished to study the question of pauperism from a living subject and perhaps take his revenge on Père Fourchon.

"How do you manage Mouche's education? How do you go to work to make him better than your girls?" queried Blondet.

"Does he ever speak to him of God?" suggested the curé.

"Oh! no, no, môsieu le curé, I never tell him to fear God, but men! God is good, and, according to you priests, has promised us the kingdom of heaven, as the rich take the whole of the kingdom of earth. I say to him: 'Mouche; steer clear of prison! that's where you come from when you go to the scaffold. Don't steal anything, make people give you what you want! Thieving leads to murder, and murder calls for human justice. The razor of justice is what you must look out for; it protects the sleep of the rich against the sleeplessness of the poor. Learn to read. With an education you'll find ways of piling up money under cover of the law, like that fine Môsieu Gaubertin; you'll be steward, like Môsieu Sibilet, who gets his rations free from môsieu le comte. The shrewd way is to keep close to the rich, there's always crumbs under their tables.' That's what I call a fine education and a solid one. So the little rascal's on the side of the law. He'll be a good boy and take care of me."

"And what will you make of him?" inquired Blondet.

"A servant, to begin with," replied Fourchon, "because, by seeing the masters at close quarters, he'll finish off his education, you see! A good example will help him make his fortune with the law in his hand, like you people! If môsieu le comte would put him in his stable to learn to look after horses, the little one would be well pleased—for, if he is afraid of men, he ain't afraid of beasts."

"You're a bright man, Père Fourchon," observed

Blondet; "you know what you are talking about, and there's good sense in what you say."

"Oh! faith, no, my good sense is at the *Grand-I-Vert*, I left it there with my two hundred-sou pieces."

"How is it that a man like you ever allowed himself to fall into such a state of poverty? For, as things are to-day, a peasant has no one but himself to blame for his ill-fortune; he is free and he can become rich. It isn't as it used to be. If the peasant is able to save a little money, he can find land for sale and buy it, and he's his own master!"

"I've seen the old times and the new times, my dear learned môsieu," rejoined Fourchon; "the sign is changed, to be sure, but the wine is still the same! *To-day* is yesterday's younger brother. There! put that in your newspaper! I'd like to know if we've been freed? We still belong to the same village and the lord is still here: I call him work. The hoe, which is all we own, has never been out of our hands. It may be the landlord or it may be the taxes that take the most out of our pockets, but we always have to spend our lives in sweat."

"But you can choose a trade, try your fortune elsewhere," suggested Blondet.

"You talk to me about going to seek my fortune, eh?—Where would I go, I'd like to know? To leave my department I'd have to have a passport that costs forty sous! It's forty years since I've known myself to have a beggarly forty-sou piece ringing against a neighbor in my pocket. To follow your nose you

need as many crowns as there are villages, and there ain't many Fourchons with enough to visit six villages! Nothing but the conscription takes us away from our communes. And what good does the army do us? To make the private support the colonel as the peasant supports the bourgeois. Out of a hundred colonels, can you count one that came out of our sides? It's just the same there as it is in the world, one gets rich where a hundred fail. What do they lack that they fail? God knows and the money-lenders! So the best thing we can do is to stay in our communes, where we're penned like sheep by force of circumstances as we used to be by the landlords. And I snap my fingers at what nails me here! Nailed by the law of necessity, nailed by the law of land-ownership, a man is always condemned to dig in the ground forever. Here, where we are, we dig the ground and turn it over and manure it and work for you people who were born rich just as we were born poor. The great mass of people will always be the same, they remain what they are. Those of us who pull ourselves up ain't so numerous as those of you who tumble down!—We know that pretty well, if we ain't very knowing. You mustn't be after us every minute in the day. We leave you in peace, let us live.—If you don't, if this keeps on, you'll be obliged to keep us in your prisons, where we'd be much better off than on our straw. If you want to remain masters, we shall always be enemies, to-day just as we were thirty year ago. You have everything, we

have nothing, so you can't expect us to be your friends!"

"That's what is called a declaration of war," observed the general.

"Monseigneur," rejoined Fourchon, "when Aigues belonged to that poor lady,—God rest her soul, for she sang wicked things in her young days!—we were happy. She let us pick up our living in her fields and our wood in her forests; she wa'n't any the poorer for that! And you, although you're at least as rich as she was, hunt us just exactly as if we were wild beasts, and drag all the poor people before the court!—Well, I tell you, it'll come to a bad end! you'll be the cause of some wicked business! I just saw your keeper, that poor thing of a Vatel, almost kill a poor old woman over a bit of wood. They'll make you out an enemy of the people and stir things up against you at neighborhood meetings; they'll curse you as straight as they blessed the late madame!—The curse of the poor people grows, monseigneur! and it grows taller than the tallest of your oaks, and the oak's what they build the gallows of. No one here tells you the truth; and that's the truth! I expect death any morning, so I don't risk much by giving you the truth to boot. I play for the peasants to dance at the great fêtes, I go with Vermichel to the Café de la Paix at Soulanges, and I hear what they say; they're ill-minded to you, and they'll make it hard for you to live hereabout. If your damned Michaud don't change, they'll force you to change him.—This

advice and the otter together are well worth twenty francs, eh?"

As the old man uttered the last sentence, a man's step was heard, and the man whom Fourchon threatened appeared unannounced. From the glance Michaud cast upon the poor man's orator, it was easy to see that the threat had reached his ears, and all Fourchon's audacity vanished. That glance produced upon the otter-hunter the effect that the gendarme produces upon the thief. Fourchon knew that he was at fault, Michaud seemed to assume the right to call him to account for a harangue which was evidently intended to intimidate the occupants of the château.

"This is the Minister of War," said the general to Blondet, indicating Michaud.

"Pardon me, madame," said that functionary to the countess, "for entering through the salon, without asking if you would receive me; but I come on urgent business which demands that I speak with my general."

Michaud, as he apologized, kept his eye on Sibilet, in whom Fourchon's bold speech aroused a secret joy which his face did not betray to anyone of the persons seated at the table, for their attention was entirely engrossed by Fourchon; while Michaud, who had reasons of his own for watching Sibilet constantly, was impressed by his expression and his manner.

"He has earned his twenty francs, as he says, monsieur le comte," cried Sibilet, "the otter is not dear."

"Give him twenty francs," said the general to his *valet de chambre.*

"So you take it away from me?" Blondet asked him.

"I want to have it stuffed!" cried the general.

"Ah! but this dear môsieu lets me keep the skin, monseigneur!" said Père Fourchon.

"Very well," cried the countess, "you shall have a hundred sous for the skin; but leave us."

The strong, offensive odor of the two denizens of the high-road so poisoned the air of the dining-room that Madame de Montcornet, whose delicate organs were offended by it, would have been obliged to leave the room if Mouche and Fourchon had remained longer. The old man owed his twenty-five francs to that circumstance. He went out, looking at Michaud with an expression of alarm, and saluting him times without number.

"What I said to monseigneur, Môsieu Michaud," he said, "was for your good."

"Or for that of the people who pay you!" retorted Michaud, with a piercing glance at him.

"When the coffee is served, leave us," said the general to his servants, "and be careful to close the doors."

Blondet, who had not yet seen the chief keeper of Aigues, experienced, as he looked at him, sensations very different from those caused by Sibilet. Michaud's appearance inspired as much esteem and confidence as Sibilet's did repulsion.

The chief keeper attracted attention first of all by

a pleasant face of regular shape, with a graceful profile, which the nose divided equally, a detail rarely found in French faces. All the features, although strictly correct in shape, did not lack expression, perhaps because of the harmonious blending in the coloring of the red and ochre tints which indicate physical courage. The eyes, of a clear brown, bright and piercing, did not haggle over giving expression to the thought; they looked you full in the face. The broad, smooth brow was made still more prominent by abundant black hair. Probity, decision, devout confidence, animated that fine face, on which the profession of arms had left some few wrinkles. Suspicion and distrust could be read there as soon as they took shape in the mind. Like all men selected for a picked body of cavalry, his figure, still graceful and slender, was such that the keeper might fairly be said to be a shapely, supple fellow. Michaud, who retained his moustaches and side-whiskers, recalled the type of those martial figures which the deluge of patriotic paintings and engravings came near making ridiculous. That type had the defect of being common in the French army; but it may be that the constant action of the same emotions, the hardships of camp-life, from which neither great nor small were exempt, and the equal efforts put forth by officers and privates on the battle-field, contributed to make the type of countenance uniform. Michaud was dressed in royal blue; he retained the black satin stock and military boots of the trooper as well as his somewhat

stiff bearing. His shoulders were thrown back and his breast forward, as if he were still under arms. The red ribbon of the Legion of Honor adorned his button-hole. Lastly, to complete this purely physical sketch with a word on the moral side, as surely as the steward, since he entered upon his functions, had never failed to address his employer as *monsieur le comte*, Michaud had never addressed his master otherwise than as *my general*.

Blondet again exchanged with Abbé Brossette a glance that signified: "What a contrast!" indicating the steward and the head-keeper; then, to ascertain if the character, the mind, and the speech were in accord with that figure, that face, that demeanor, he looked at Michaud and said:

"*Mon Dieu!* I went out early this morning and I found your keepers still asleep!"

"At what time?" the ex-trooper asked with some uneasiness.

"At half-past seven."

Michaud darted an almost malicious glance at his general.

"By which gate did monsieur leave the park?" he said.

"By the Conches gate. The keeper was at the window, in his shirt, looking at me."

"Gaillard had just gone to bed, probably," rejoined Michaud. "When you said that you went out early, I supposed that you rose at daybreak, and in that case, if my keeper was in the house, it must have been that he was sick; but at half-past

seven he was going to bed.—We watch all night," he continued, after a pause, responding to an astonished glance from the countess; "but our vigilance is always defeated! You have just given twenty-five francs to a man who calmly assisted a few moments ago in concealing the traces of a theft committed on your estate this morning. By the way, we will talk about that matter when you have finished, my general, for we must make up our minds to something."

"You are always full of your law, my dear Michaud, and *summum jus, summa injuria.* If you are not more tolerant, you'll make a mess of it," said Sibilet. "I would have liked you to hear Père Fourchon just now, for the wine he had drunk made him speak more freely than usual."

"He terrified me," said the countess.

"He said nothing that I have not known for a long while," the general replied.

"Oh! the rascal wasn't drunk; he played his part, for whose benefit?—You know, perhaps?" said Michaud, making Sibilet flush by the keen glance he fixed upon him.

"*O rus!*" cried Blondet, glancing at Abbé Brossette.

"These poor people are suffering," said the countess, "and there was some truth in what Père Fourchon *shouted* at us, for it can't be said that he *spoke* to us."

"Madame," Michaud replied, "do you imagine that the Emperor's soldiers slept on roses for four

years?—My general is a count, he's a grand officer in the Legion of Honor, he has had grants of money: do you see any signs of jealousy on my part, although I fought as he did? Have I any desire to trick him out of his glory, to steal his pension, to refuse him the honors due to his rank? The peasant ought to obey as soldiers obey; he ought to have the soldier's honesty, his respect for vested rights, and to try to become an officer by straightforward means, by work, not by theft. The ploughshare and the sabre are twin brothers. The soldier has what the peasant doesn't have,—death staring him in the face every minute."

"That's what I would like to say to them in the pulpit!" cried Abbé Brossette.

"Tolerant?" continued the keeper, answering Sibilet's challenge. "I would tolerate a loss of ten per cent. on the gross revenues of Aigues; but by the way things are going on, it will be nearer thirty per cent. that you'll lose, my general; and, if Monsieur Sibilet gets a certain percentage of the receipts, I don't understand his tolerance, for he charitably gives up ten or twelve hundred francs a year."

"My dear Monsieur Michaud," retorted Sibilet, in a surly tone, "as I have told monsieur le comte, I would rather lose twelve hundred francs than my life. Think it over seriously; I am not grudging of my advice to you in that respect."

"Life?" cried the countess; "in Heaven's name, is anybody's life in danger?"

"We ought not to discuss affairs of State here," laughed the general.—"All this means, madame, that Sibilet, being a financier, is timid and cowardly, whereas my Minister of War is brave and, like his general, fears nothing."

"Say prudent, monsieur le comte!" cried Sibilet.

"Well, well! so we're like Cooper's heroes in the American forests, surrounded with pitfalls by savages?" inquired Blondet, mockingly.

"Nonsense! it is your business, messieurs, to find a way to manage affairs without frightening us by the creaking of the wheels of your machinery," said Madame de Montcornet.

"Ah! madame la comtesse, perhaps it is necessary that you should know all that one of the pretty caps you wear costs in the way of toil and perspiration here," said the curé.

"No, for in that case I might get along without them, look with respect on a twenty-franc piece, and grow to be stingy like all country people, and I should lose too much by it," rejoined the countess, with a laugh.—"Come, my dear abbé, give me your arm, let us leave the general with his two ministers, and go to the Avonne gate to see Madame Michaud, whom I have not called on since my arrival; it is high time for me to be looking after my little protégée."

And the pretty creature, already forgetting Mouche's and Fourchon's rags, their malevolent glances, and Sibilet's terror, went to put on her boots and hat.

Abbé Brossette and Blondet, in obedience to the summons of the mistress, followed her and waited on the terrace in front of the house.

"What do you think about all this?" Blondet asked the abbé.

"I am a pariah; they keep watch on me as the common enemy; I am obliged to keep the eyes and ears of prudence open every moment, to avoid the snares that are set for me in order to get rid of me," was the reply. "Between ourselves, I am beginning to wonder if they won't fire at me some day."

"And yet you stay here?" said Blondet.

"One does not abandon the cause of God any more than that of an emperor!" replied the priest, with a simplicity that made a deep impression upon Blondet.

He took the priest's hand and pressed it cordially.

"You can understand, therefore," continued the abbé, "why it is impossible for me to know anything of what is going on. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the general labors under the weight of what is called in Artois and in Belgium the *mauvais gré!*" *

It is essential at this point to say a few words concerning the curé of Blangy.

The abbé was the fourth son of an estimable bourgeois family of Autun; he was a man of intellect, and had the highest respect for his calling. A small, slender man, he redeemed his puny figure by the air of stubborn determination which is becoming to Burgundians in general. He had accepted this post

* Ill-will.

of secondary importance from genuine devotion, for his religious convictions were strengthened by political conviction. There was something in him of the priest of old times; he was passionately devoted to the church and the clergy; he looked at things on every side, and his ambition was not marred by egoism: *to serve* was his motto, to serve the Church and the monarchy in the post of greatest danger, to serve in the rear rank, like a soldier who feels that he is destined, sooner or later, to become a general by virtue of his desire to do right and by his courage. He paltered with none of his vows of chastity, poverty, obedience; he performed them all, like all the other duties of his position, with the simple-mindedness and cheerfulness that are unerring indications of an upright mind, devoted to well-doing by the impulsion of natural instinct as well as by the power and firmness of religious convictions.

At the first glance, that eminent priest divined Blondet's attachment for the countess; he realized that with a Troisville and a journalist of monarchical opinions he would do well to show himself a man of mind, for his robe would always be respected. Almost every evening he came to the château to make a fourth at whist. The journalist, who was capable of appreciating Abbé Brossette's worth, had shown so much deference to him that they had taken a strong liking to each other, as is always the case with an intelligent man, delighted to find a congenial companion, or, if you please, a listener. Every sword loves its scabbard.

"But to what do you, monsieur l'abbé, who, by your devotion, are raised above your position, attribute this condition of things?"

"I do not choose to answer you with trite commonplaces after such a flattering parenthesis," said the abbé, with a smile. "What is taking place in this valley is taking place everywhere in France, and is connected with the hopes which the movement of 1789 infiltrated, so to speak, into the peasant's mind. The Revolution affected certain provinces more deeply than others, and this outlying part of Bourgogne, being so near Paris, is one of the districts where the meaning of the movement was taken to be the triumph of the Gaul over the Frank. Historically, the peasants have not progressed beyond the morrow of the Jacquerie, their defeat has remained engraved on their brains. They no longer remember the fact, it has passed to the phase of an instinctive idea. That idea is in the peasant blood as the idea of superiority was formerly in noble blood. The Revolution of 1789 was the vengeance of the vanquished. The peasants placed their feet in possession of the soil, which the feudal laws had kept from them for twelve hundred years. Thence comes their affection for the land, which they divide among themselves to such a point as to cut a furrow in two, which often puts an end to the collection of taxes, for the value of the property would not suffice to cover the expense of proceedings to recover them."

"Their obstinacy, their suspicion, if you choose,

is so great in that respect, that in a thousand cantons out of the three thousand which make up the territory of France, it is impossible for a wealthy man to buy any real estate from the peasants," said Blondet, interrupting the abbé. "Although they transfer their little patches of land among themselves, they won't let it pass into bourgeois hands for any price or on any condition. The more money the great landowner offers, the greater the vague uneasiness of the peasant. Expropriation alone brings the peasant's property within the ordinary laws of bargain and sale. Many people have noticed the fact, and can find no cause for it."

"The cause is this," replied Abbé Brossette, rightly thinking that, with Blondet, a pause was equivalent to a question. "Twelve centuries are a mere nothing to a caste which the historic spectacle of civilization has never diverted from its principal thought, and which still proudly retains the broad-brimmed hat and the silk band of its masters, that it has worn ever since the day when the abandonment of the fashion allowed it to be adopted. The love whose roots were buried in the entrails of the common people, which clung fiercely to Napoléon, although he never understood it as well as he thought, and which may serve to explain the prodigy of his return in 1815, proceeded solely from that idea. In the eyes of the people, Napoléon, who was constantly united to the people by his million of soldiers, is still the king come forth from the sides of the Revolution, the man who confirmed them in

the possession of the national property. His coronation was steeped in that idea—"

"An idea which 1814 interfered with, unfortunately, and which the monarchy should hold sacred," said Blondet, earnestly; "for the people may find near the throne a prince to whom his father has left the head of Louis XVI. as an heirloom."

"Here's madame, let us say no more," said the abbé, in an undertone; "Fourchon has frightened her, and we must keep her here in the interest of the religion, of the throne, and of the province itself."

Michaud, the head-keeper at Aigues, had come to the château, without doubt, apropos of the assault upon Vatel's eyes. But before reporting the deliberations of the council of State, the course of our story demands a succinct narration of the circumstances under which the general had purchased Aigues, of the important reasons that led to the appointment of Sibilet as steward of that magnificent property, of the motives of Michaud's appointment as head-keeper, in short, of all the antecedent events to which were due the condition of the popular mind and the fears expressed by Sibilet.

This rapid sketch will have the merit of introducing some of the principal actors in the drama, of defining their interests, and of making clear the perils of the position then occupied by General Comte de Montcornet.

VI

A HISTORY OF THIEVES

About 1791, Mademoiselle Laguerre, upon paying a visit to her estate, accepted as steward the son of the ex-bailiff of Soulanges, one Gaubertin. The small town of Soulanges, to-day simply the chief place of a canton, was the capital of a county of considerable extent in the days when the house of Bourgogne made war against the house of France. Ville-aux-Fayes, to-day the seat of the sub-prefecture, in those days was simply a small fief depending upon Soulanges, like Aigues, Ronquerolles, Cerneux, Conches, and fifteen other parishes. The Soulanges continued to be counts, while the Ronquerolles of to-day are marquises by favor of that power called the court, which made the son of Captain du Plessis a duke, with precedence over the first families of the conquest. This proves that towns, like families, have very erratic destinies.

The bailiff's son, a young man without fortune of any sort, succeeded a steward enriched by an incumbency of thirty years, who preferred a third interest in the famous Minoret Company to the management of the Aigues estate. In his own

interest, the future contractor for supplies had presented as his successor François Gaubertin, then just of age, who had been his agent for five years, who undertook to cover up his retirement, and, in his gratitude for the hints he received from his master in stewardship, promised to obtain for him a discharge in full from Mademoiselle Laguerre, seeing that she was terribly alarmed by the Revolution. The former bailiff, become public accuser for the department, was the protector of the frightened songstress. That provincial Fouquier-Tinville organized a false *émeute* against a queen of the stage, suspected because of her intimacy with the aristocracy, in order to give his son the credit of a fictitious rescue, by the aid of which he procured his predecessor's release. Citizeness Laguerre thereupon made François Gaubertin her prime minister, from policy as well as from gratitude.

The future purveyor of supplies for the Republic had not spoiled mademoiselle: he had forwarded to her at Paris about thirty thousand francs a year, although the Aigues estate must have produced at least forty thousand in those days; so that the ignorant opera-singer was amazed when Gaubertin promised her thirty-six thousand.

To justify the present fortune of the steward of Aigues before the tribunal of probabilities, it is necessary to explain its beginnings. By his father's influence, young Gaubertin was chosen mayor of Blangy. He was able, therefore, to compel payment in silver, despite the laws, by *terrorizing*—a word of

the time—debtors who might, as he chose, be reached or not by the crushing requisitions of the Republic. The steward gave his employer *assignats*, throughout the currency of that paper money, which, if it did not make the public fortune, made many private fortunes. From 1792 to 1795, in three years, young Gaubertin collected a hundred and fifty thousand francs at Aigues, with which he operated on the Bourse at Paris. Stuffed with *assignats*, Mademoiselle Laguerre was compelled to coin money with her diamonds, thenceforth useless; she turned them over to Gaubertin, who sold them and faithfully handed her the full price in coin. That instance of probity affected mademoiselle deeply; she believed thenceforth in Gaubertin as in Piccini.

In 1796, the date of his marriage to Citizeness Isaure Mouchon, daughter of a member of the Convention who was a friend of his father, Gaubertin possessed three hundred and fifty thousand francs in coin; and as the Directory seemed to him likely to last, he determined, before marrying, to have mademoiselle approve his five years' management, on the pretext that he anticipated a change of government.

"I shall be a paterfamilias," he said; "you know what the general reputation of stewards is; my father-in-law is a republican of true Roman probity, and an influential man withal; I wish to show him that I am worthy of him."

Mademoiselle Laguerre approved Gaubertin's accounts in the most flattering terms.

To inspire confidence in madame at Aigues, the steward tried, in the beginning, to repress the peasants, fearing, with justice, that the revenues would suffer from their devastations, and that his next perquisites from the dealer in wood might show a decrease; but at that time the sovereign people considered themselves at home everywhere; madame was afraid of her kings when she saw them at such close quarters, and told her Richelieu that she wanted, above everything, to die in peace. The income of the former first subject of the empire of song was so much above her expenses that she allowed the most disastrous precedents to be established. For instance, to avoid lawsuits, she suffered her neighbors to encroach upon her land. Knowing that her park was surrounded by impassable walls, she was not afraid of being disturbed in her immediate enjoyment, and desired nothing but peace, like the true philosopher she was. A few thousand francs more or less of income, deductions demanded on the amount of his rent by the dealer in wood on account of the raids committed by the peasants, what were those in the eyes of an ex-singer at the Opéra, lavish and heedless, who had acquired an income of a hundred thousand francs at the cost of pleasure alone, and who had recently submitted, without complaint, to a reduction to two-thirds on an income of sixty thousand?

"Oh, well!" she said, with the ready compliance of the wantons of the old régime, "everybody must live, even the Republic!"

The awe-inspiring Mademoiselle Cochet, her lady's maid and female vizier, had tried to open her eyes when she saw the empire Gaubertin was acquiring over her whom he called *madame* from the beginning, despite the revolutionary laws concerning equality; but Gaubertin opened Mademoiselle Cochet's eyes by showing her a supposititious denunciation sent to his father, the public prosecutor, in which she was accused in vehement terms of corresponding with Pitt and Coburg. Thenceforth the two powers shared the supreme authority, but the division was à la Montgomery. La Cochet praised Gaubertin to Mademoiselle Laguerre, as Gaubertin praised La Cochet to her. The lady's maid's bed was all made by the way, she knew that she was down in madame's will for sixty thousand francs. Madame could not do without Cochet, she was so accustomed to her. The girl knew all of dear mistress's toilette secrets; she had the art of putting dear mistress to sleep at night with an endless supply of anecdotes and of awakening her in the morning with flattering words; in fact, until the day of dear mistress's death she never noticed any change in her, and when dear mistress was in her coffin, she thought her more attractive, doubtless, than she had ever seen her.

The annual profits of Gaubertin and Mademoiselle Cochet, their salaries, their vested interests, became so considerable, that the most affectionate kinsmen could not have been more attached than they to the excellent creature. No one knows how a knave

fondles his dupe. A mother is not so caressing nor so thoughtful for the child she adores as every dealer in chicanery is for his milch-cow. What triumphs are scored by performances of *Tartuffe* behind closed doors! It is better than friendship. Molière died too early; he would have shown us Orgon's despair, bored by his family, bothered by his children, sighing for the flattery of Tartuffe, and exclaiming:

"Those were the good old times!"

In the last eight years of her life, Mademoiselle Laguerre received only thirty thousand francs of the fifty thousand which the estate of Aigues yielded in reality. Gaubertin, as we see, had reached the same administrative result as his predecessor, although the rents and crops had shown a notable increase between 1791 and 1815, to say nothing of Mademoiselle Laguerre's constant purchases of land. But the plan formed by Gaubertin to inherit Aigues upon madame's approaching demise, compelled him to keep the magnificent estate in a condition of visible depreciation so far as the ostensible revenues were concerned. Being admitted to the secret of the scheme, La Cochet was allowed to share in the profits. As the ex-queen of the stage, with an income of twenty thousand francs in the fund called *consolidated*,—the language of politics lends itself so readily to pleasantry,—barely spent the said twenty thousand francs in her declining days, she was amazed at the purchases made every year by her steward to employ the available funds—she who used always to live beyond her income. What

was really the effect of the few necessities of her old age seemed to her a result of the probity of Gaubertin and Mademoiselle Cochet.

"Two pearls!" she would say to those who came to see her.

Moreover, Gaubertin maintained the appearance of probity in his accounts. He charged himself with the rents received to the last sou. Whatever was likely to make an impression on the singer's feeble intellect, in the way of arithmetic, was clear and accurate. The steward looked for his profits to the other side of the account, the running expenses, bargains to be concluded, lawsuits which he invented, new works, repairs—items which madame never verified, and which he sometimes doubled, in concert with the contractors whose silence he purchased by handsome gratuities. His facility in such matters commended Gaubertin to public esteem, and madame's praises were in every mouth; for, in addition to the money put in circulation by the works she undertook upon her estate, she gave away large sums in charity.

"May God preserve the dear lady!" was the universal remark.

Indeed, everyone obtained something from her, as a pure gift or indirectly. By way of reprisal for her youth, the old artiste was conscientiously pillaged, and so deliberately that everyone kept within bounds, so that matters should not go so far that she would open her eyes, sell Aigues, and return to Paris.

That same thieving interest, alas! was the cause of the assassination of Paul-Louis Courier, who made the mistake of announcing the sale of his estate and his purpose to take away his wife, upon whom several Touraine Tonsards were living. Restrained by that fear, the marauders of Aigues cut no young trees except in the last extremity, when they could find no branches within reach of the hooks attached to their long poles. They did as little harm as possible in the interest of their thieving industry. Nevertheless, during the last years of Mademoiselle Laguerre's life, the custom of gathering wood had became a most barefaced abuse. On some clear nights no less than two hundred bundles were made up. As for the gleaning and the *hallebotage*, Aigues lost thereby, as Sibilet proved, the fourth part of the crops.

Mademoiselle Laguerre had forbidden La Cochet to marry during her lifetime, as the result of a sort of selfishness as between mistress and maid of which there have been many instances in all countries, and which is no more absurd than the mania of keeping until one's last breath effects that are utterly useless to one's material welfare, at the risk of being poisoned by impatient heirs. So it was that, three weeks after Mademoiselle Laguerre's funeral, Mademoiselle Cochet married the brigadier of the Soulanges gendarmerie, one Soudry, a very handsome man of forty-two years, who, ever since 1800, when the gendarmerie came into being, had been to see her at Aigues almost every day, and

who dined at least four times a week with her and the Gaubertins.

Throughout her life madame's table was set for herself alone or for her guests. Despite their familiarity, neither La Cochet nor the Gaubertins were ever admitted to the table of the first subject of the Royal Academy of Music and Dancing, who maintained to her last hour her etiquette, her habits in the matter of her toilette, her rouge and her high-heeled slippers, her carriage, her servants and her goddess-like majesty. Goddess on the stage, goddess in the city, she remained a goddess even in the depths of the country, where her memory is still adored and certainly balances the court of Louis XVI. in the minds of the *first society* of Soulanges.

This Soudry, who from his first arrival in the province paid court to La Cochet, owned the finest house in Soulanges, six thousand francs, and the prospect of a retiring pension of four hundred francs on the day he left the service. Having become Madame Soudry, La Cochet enjoyed high consideration in Soulanges. Although she maintained absolute secrecy as to the sum total of her savings, which were invested, as were Gaubertin's funds, in Paris, with the agent of the wine-merchants of the department, one Leclercq, a native of the province, whose sleeping partner the steward was, public opinion attributed to the former lady's maid one of the greatest fortunes in that little town of twelve hundred souls.

To the unbounded amazement of the neighborhood,

Monsieur and Madame Soudry, by their marriage-contract, acknowledged as their legitimate offspring a natural son of the gendarme, who thereby became the heir of Madame Soudry's fortune. On the day on which that son became officially possessed of a mother he finished his legal studies at Paris, and proposed to pass his time of probation there with a view to entering the magistracy.

It is hardly necessary to remark that a mutual understanding of twenty years cemented a firm friendship between the Gaubertins and the Soudrys. To the end of their days the two families reciprocally spoke of each other, *urbi et orbi*, as *the finest people* in France. Such an attachment, based upon a reciprocal knowledge of the secret stains upon the white tunics of each other's consciences, is one of the tightest of all earthly bonds. You who read this social drama are so certain of it, that, in order to explain the enduring quality of certain intimacies that put your egoism to shame, you say of two persons: "They surely have committed some crime together!"

After twenty-five years of control, the steward found himself in possession of six hundred thousand francs in cash, and La Cochet had about two hundred and fifty thousand. The constant, active turning over of these funds, entrusted to the house of Leclercq et Cie, Quai de Béthune, Ile Saint-Louis, a rival of the famous house of Grandet, assisted greatly to increase the fortune of the wine-dealer's agent and of Gaubertin. At Mademoiselle Laguerre's

death, the steward's oldest daughter, Jenny, was sought in marriage by Leclercq, the head of the Quai de Béthune house. Gaubertin at that time was flattering himself that he would soon become master of Aigues by virtue of a scheme developed in the office of Maître Lupin, a notary set up in business by him at Soulanges twelve years before.

Lupin, the son of the last steward of the Soulanges family, had given his sanction to undervaluations, to an estimate, for purposes of sale, fifty per cent. below the true value, to unpublished advertisements, and to all the manœuvres, unhappily so common in the provinces, for selling valuable real estate under the cloak, as the saying is. Lately, it is said, a company has been formed in Paris to levy contributions upon the authors of these frauds by threatening to outbid them. But in 1816 France was not, as it is to-day, burned by the scorching fire of publicity; the accomplices could rely, therefore, upon the partition of Aigues as arranged secretly between La Cochet, the notary, and Gaubertin, who reserved to himself, *in petto*, the right to offer them a sum of money in cash for their lots as soon as the title to the estate should stand in his name. The solicitor, instructed by Lupin to obtain an order for a sale at auction from the court, had sold his office by verbal agreement to Gaubertin for his son, so that he favored the spoliation, if it should happen that the eleven Picardie farmers to whom this inheritance fell from the clouds should consider themselves despoiled.

Just at the moment when all the interested parties believed that their fortunes were doubled, a solicitor from Paris came down—it was the day before the final decree of sale—to instruct one of the solicitors at Ville-aux-Fayes, who happened to be an old clerk of his, to purchase Aigues, and he bid it off at eleven hundred thousand francs. None of the conspirators dared bid above that figure. Gaubertin believed he had been betrayed by Soudry, as Soudry and Lupin believed that they had been tricked by Gaubertin; but the announcement of the real purchaser's name reconciled them. Although suspecting the plan formed by Gaubertin, Lupin, and Soudry, the provincial solicitor was careful not to enlighten his former employer concerning it. For this reason: in case of any indiscretion on the part of the new owners of the estate, that functionary would have too many people on his back to be able to remain in the province. That silence, peculiar to provincials, will be fully justified, moreover, by the events narrated in this Study. If the provincial is cunning, he is compelled to be; his justification is to be found in his danger, admirably expressed by the proverb: *One must howl with the wolves!* the real meaning of the character of Philinte.

When General de Montcornet took possession of Aigues, Gaubertin was no longer so rich that he could afford to leave his place. In order to marry his eldest daughter to the wealthy banker of Quai de Béthune, he was obliged to furnish a dowry of two hundred thousand francs; he had to pay thirty

thousand francs for the office purchased for his son; that left him no more than three hundred and seventy thousand, out of which he would sooner or later have to provide the dowry of his other daughter, Elisa, for whom he flattered himself that he could arrange at least as fine a match as her sister had made. The steward determined to study the Comte de Montcornet, with a view of ascertaining if he could disgust him with Aigues, meaning in that case to carry out, for his sole benefit, the scheme that had miscarried before.

With the shrewdness peculiar to those people who make their fortunes by sharp practices, Gaubertin believed in the resemblance, by no means improbable, between the characters of an old soldier and an old singer. A girl from the Opéra, one of Napoléon's generals—have they not the same lavish habits, the same heedlessness? Does not wealth come in both cases, to the singer and to the soldier, capriciously and under fire? If you do fall in with cunning, astute, politic soldiers, are they not exceptions to the general rule? And almost always the soldier, especially a daring fighter like Montcornet, proves to be a simple, confiding creature, a novice in business, and altogether unfitted to deal with the thousand details of the management of an estate. Gaubertin flattered himself that he could catch and hold the general in the net in which Mademoiselle Laguerre had ended her days. Now, the Emperor had once designedly permitted Montcornet to fill the same position in Pomerania that Gaubertin filled at Aigues;

so that the general knew all about the plunder of stewardship.

On making up his mind to plant cabbages, as the first Duc de Biron expressed it, the old cuirassier proposed to turn his attention to business, in order to distract his mind from his fall. Although he had turned over his army corps to the Bourbons, that service, performed by several generals and known as the disbanding of the army of the Loire, could not atone for the crime of having followed the man of the Hundred Days to his last battle-field. In presence of the foreigners, it was impossible for the peer of 1815 to retain his place on the army list, much less to remain at the Luxembourg. Montcornet, therefore, by the advice of a marshal who was in disgrace, went to cultivate carrots in their native soil. The general was not lacking in the cunning peculiar to old sentry-box wolves, and at the very outset of his examination of his property, he recognized Gaubertin as a genuine steward of the old régime, a thorough knave, of a sort familiar to almost all Napoléon's dukes and marshals, mushrooms sprung from the soil of the people.

Observing Gaubertin's profound skill in rural administration, the crafty cuirassier realized how advantageous it would be for him to retain him in order to make himself familiar with his criminal agricultural methods: so he pretended to continue the régime of Mademoiselle Laguerre, and affected a feigned heedlessness which deceived the steward. His apparent idiocy lasted as long a time as the

general required to ascertain the strength and weakness of Aigues, the items of revenue, the method of collecting them, how and where he was being robbed, what improvements could be introduced and where a saving could be made. Then, one fine day, having surprised Gaubertin with his hand in the bag, according to the consecrated expression, the general flew into one of those paroxysms of rage which are peculiar to the conquerors of countries. Thereupon he was guilty of one of those capital mistakes which are quite capable of disordering the whole life of a man who had not his great fortune or his firmness of character, and which gave birth to all the disasters, great and small, with which this narrative swarms. A pupil of the imperial school, accustomed to run his sabre through everything, overflowing with contempt for civilians, Montcornet thought that he should not put on gloves to turn a rascally steward out-of-doors. Civil life and its infinite precautions were unknown to the general, who was soured, too, by his disgrace; so he deeply humiliated Gaubertin, who drew that cavalier treatment upon himself by a retort whose cynicism aroused Montcornet's rage.

"You are living on my estate!" the count had said, with mocking severity.

"Do you think that I could live on the sky?" Gaubertin retorted, with a laugh.

"Off with you, hound! I discharge you!" cried the general, belaboring him with his hunting-crop, which fact the steward always denied, having received the blows in private.

"I won't go without my release," said Gaubertin, coolly, having moved to a safe distance from the cuirassier.

"We'll see what the police-court will think of you," said Montcornet, shrugging his shoulders.

At the threat of proceedings in the police-court, Gaubertin glanced at the count with a smile. That smile had the effect of relaxing the general's arm as if the muscles had been cut. Let us explain that smile.

Two years before, Gaubertin's brother-in-law, one Gendrin, who had long been a judge of the court of first instance at Ville-aux-Fayes, had become president of that court through the patronage of the Comte de Soulanges. Created a peer in 1814, Monsieur de Soulanges had remained true to the Bourbons during the Hundred Days, so that he ventured to solicit that appointment from the Keeper of the Seals. His relationship to the magistrate gave Gaubertin some importance in the province. Relatively speaking, a president of the lower court in a small town is a greater personage than a first president of a royal court, who finds, in the metropolis of his jurisdiction, his equals in rank in the persons of the general, the bishop, the prefect, the receiver-general; whereas the other magistrate has no equals in his bailiwick, the king's attorney and the sub-prefect being removable. Young Soudry, the comrade of young Gaubertin, in Paris as well as at Aigues, had just been appointed deputy king's attorney in the chief town of the department. Before he became

brigadier of the gendarmes, the elder Soudry, a quartermaster in the artillery, had been wounded in a skirmish while defending Monsieur de Soulanges, then adjutant-general. At the time of the creation of the gendarmerie, the Comte de Soulanges, who had become a colonel, had requested the command of the brigade of Soulanges for his rescuer; and, later, he solicited the appointment of young Soudry to the post he now occupied. So that, Mademoiselle Gaubertin's marriage being a settled thing on Quai de Béthune, the unfaithful steward felt that he occupied a stronger position in the province than a lieutenant-general on waiting orders.

If this narrative afforded no other instruction than that to be derived from the falling out of the general and his steward, it would still be profitable to many people for their guidance in life. He who can read Machiavelli to good purpose needs no other demonstration that human prudence consists in never threatening, in acting without talking, in favoring the retreat of one's enemy by not treading, as the proverb says, on the serpent's tail, and in refraining, as from murder, from wounding the self-esteem of one who is smaller than one's self. The blow, however prejudicial it may be to opposing interests, is sure to be pardoned sooner or later, it can be explained in a thousand ways; but the self-esteem which never ceases to bleed from the wound it has received never forgives the idea. The moral personality is more sensitive, more keenly alive, in some sort, than the physical personality. The

heart and the blood are less impressionable than the nerves. In fact, our inward being governs us, do what we may. Two families that have slaughtered each other, as in Bretagne and Vendée during the civil wars, can be reconciled; but you can never reconcile the despoiled and the despoilers any more than you can the slandered and the slanderers. We ought never to insult one another except in epic poems just before we kill ourselves. The savage and the peasant, who much resembles the savage, never speak except to lay snares for their adversaries. Since 1789, France has been trying to make men believe, against all the evidence, that they are equal; now, to say to a man: "You are a knave!" is an inconsequential jest; but to prove it to him by catching him in the act and thrashing him, to threaten him with the police-court without prosecuting him, is to bring him back to the inequality of conditions. If the common people forgive no sort of superiority, how can you expect a scoundrel to forgive an honest man?

If Montcornet had dismissed his steward on the pretext of having to discharge some long-standing obligation by putting an old soldier in his place, to be sure neither Gaubertin nor he would have been deceived, they would have understood each other; but by sparing his steward's self-esteem the general would have left a door open for him to withdraw; Gaubertin would then have left the great landowner at peace, he would have forgotten his defeat at the sale, and perhaps he would have sought employment

for his capital at Paris. But being ignominiously turned out, the steward cherished against his master one of those rancorous hatreds which are an element of life in the provinces, and whose duration, persistence, and constant scheming would astonish diplomatists who are accustomed to be astonished at nothing. A burning desire for revenge suggested to him that he retire to Ville-aux-Fayes and secure a position there from which he could injure Montcornet, and stir up enough enemies against him to compel him to offer Aigues for sale once more.

Everything combined to deceive the general, for Gaubertin's exterior was not of a nature to put him on his guard or alarm him. As a matter of tradition, the steward always affected, not poverty exactly, but straitened circumstances. He inherited that rule of conduct from his predecessor. For twelve years he had never lost an opportunity to talk about his three children, his wife, and the enormous expenses caused by his numerous family. Mademoiselle Laguerre, whom Gaubertin told that he was too poor to pay for his son's education at Paris, had paid the whole cost of it; she gave a hundred louis a year to her godson, for she was Claude Gaubertin's godmother.

The next day, Gaubertin made his appearance, accompanied by a keeper named Courtecuisse, and in very haughty fashion demanded a release in full from the general, showing him that given him by the late mademoiselle in most flattering terms, and he ironically requested him to see if he could find

any real estate or property of any sort belonging to him, Gaubertin. If he received gratuities from the dealers in wood and the farmers, on the renewal of their leases, Mademoiselle Laguerre, he said, had always authorized him to do so, and not only did she make money by allowing him to accept them, but she led a much more peaceful life. The country people would have laid down their lives for mademoiselle, whereas, by going on as he had begun, the general was storing up many difficulties for himself.

Gaubertin—and this last trait is of frequent occurrence in most of the professions in which people appropriate the property of others by methods not anticipated by the Code—Gaubertin believed himself to be a perfectly honest man. In the first place, he had owned for so long the money extorted by terror from Mademoiselle Laguerre's farmers and paid to her in *assignats*, that he considered it to have been lawfully acquired. It was a matter of business. Indeed, he even thought that he had run some risk by accepting coin. Legally, Mademoiselle was entitled to receive nothing but *assignats*. *Legally* is a robust adverb, it supports many fortunes! In fact, since there have been great landowners and stewards, that is to say, since the origin of societies, the steward has forged for his own use a scheme of reasoning upon which cooks act to-day, and which may be stated thus in its simplest form:

"If my mistress," every cook reflects, "should go to market herself, she would be likely to pay more

for her supplies than I charge for them in my account; she saves money by it, and my profits are better in my pocket than in the dealers'."

"If mademoiselle managed the estate herself, she wouldn't get thirty thousand francs out of it; the peasants, the dealers, the workmen, would steal the difference: it's more natural for me to keep it, and I save her a great deal of trouble!" said Gaubertin to himself.

The Catholic religion alone has the power to prevent such capitulations of conscience; but, since 1789, religion is without influence over two-thirds of the people of France. So that the peasants, whose minds are very wide-awake, and whom poverty impels to imitation, had reached a shockingly demoralized condition in the valley of Aigues. They attended mass on Sunday, but outside the church, for they were in the habit of making appointments there for trading and business generally.

We are now in a position to measure all the evil results of the carelessness and indifference of the former leading singer of the Royal Academy of Music. Mademoiselle Laguerre did, through pure selfishness, betray the cause of those who possess, all of whom are targets for the hatred of those who do not possess. Since 1792, all the landed proprietors in France are responsible for one another. Alas! if the feudal families, less numerous than the bourgeois families of to-day, did not understand the importance of standing together in 1400 under Louis XI., nor in 1600 under Richelieu, can it be thought that, despite

the boasted progress of the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie will be more united than the nobility was? An oligarchy of a hundred thousand rich men has all the disadvantages of a democracy without its advantages. The motto of *everyone for himself*, family selfishness, will kill the oligarchical selfishness so necessary to modern society, which England has practised with marvellous success for three centuries. Whatever happens, landowners will not understand the necessity of the discipline which makes the Church an admirable model of government, until the moment when they find that they are threatened in their own possessions, and then it will be too late. The audacity with which communism, that living and active logical outcome of democracy, attacks society on the moral side, tells us that from this day forth the popular Samson, become prudent, will undermine the columns of society in the cellar instead of shaking them down in the banquet-hall.

VII

VANISHED SOCIAL SPECIES

The Aigues estate could not dispense with the services of a steward, for the general did not propose to sacrifice the enjoyments of the winter in Paris, where he had a superb mansion on Rue Neuve-des-Mathurins. He looked about, therefore, for a successor to Gaubertin, but he certainly did not look with more care than Gaubertin took to provide him with one of his own making.

Of all confidential positions, there is not one that requires at once more acquired knowledge and more energy than that of steward of a great estate. The difficulty of procuring a suitable man is known only to rich landowners whose property is situated outside of a circle drawn around the capital at a distance of about forty leagues. That circle marks the limit of the strictly agricultural holdings, whose products find a sure market in Paris, and which yield revenues assured by long leases, for which there are always numerous applicants, themselves rich. These farmers come in their cabriolets to pay their rent in bank-notes, unless their agents at the market undertake to make their payments for them. The farms

in Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne, Oise, Eure-et-Loir, Seine-Inférieure, and Loiret are so eagerly sought after, that the capital invested does not always yield one and a half per cent. Compared with the revenue from estates in Holland, England, and Belgium, that rate is enormous; but, fifty leagues from Paris, an estate of considerable size implies so many different methods of working, so many products of different kinds, that it constitutes an industry in itself, with all the risks of a manufacturing plant. A wealthy landowner is simply a merchant obliged to find a market for his products, neither more nor less than a manufacturer of iron or cotton. He does not even avoid competition: the peasant, the small proprietor, compete desperately with him, descending to transactions impossible to high-minded people.

A steward should be acquainted with surveying, and familiar with the customs of the province, its methods of sale and exploitation, should be capable of a little trickery to protect the interests confided to him, should understand accounts, and should be in robust health, with a special fondness for active movement and equestrianism. Having to represent the master and to have constant dealings with him, the steward should not be a man of the people. As there are few stewards with a salary of a thousand crowns, the problem seemed insoluble. How could one expect to procure so many qualities at a moderate price, in a province where the men who are endowed with those qualities are eligible to every sort

of employment?—To send for a man unfamiliar with the country is to pay dear for the experience he will eventually acquire. To educate a young man taken from the locality is often to nourish a viper of ingratitude. One must choose, therefore, between the unskilled probity which works harm through inertia or short-sightedness, and the adroitness that thinks of its own interests. Hence the social nomenclature and the natural history of stewards, thus defined by a great Polish noble: "We have," he said, "two kinds of stewards: those who think only of themselves, and those who think of us and of themselves; lucky the landowner who puts his hands upon the second! As for the steward who thinks only of us, he has never yet been found."

We have made the acquaintance elsewhere of a steward whose thoughts were devoted to his own interests and his master's.—See *A Start in Life*, SCENES OF PRIVATE LIFE.—Gaubertin is the type of the steward intent upon his own interests exclusively. To present the third term of the problem would be to display to the public admiration an improbable type, which the nobility has known, however,—*See The Cabinet of Antiquities*, SCENES OF PROVINCIAL LIFE,—but which disappeared with it. Aristocratic manners will inevitably be modified by the constant subdivision of fortunes. If there are not in France to-day twenty fortunes managed by agents, fifty years hence there will not be a hundred great estates in the hands of stewards, unless by virtue of changes in the civil law. Every rich

landowner will have to attend to his interests in person.

This transformation, already in progress, suggested the following reply made by a shrewd old lady to some one who asked her why, since 1830, she had remained in Paris during the summer: "I have stopped visiting at châteaux since they have been made into farm-houses."—But what will be the result of this man to man discussion, constantly increasing in heat, between rich and poor? This Study is written for the sole purpose of throwing light upon that burning social question.

The extraordinary perplexity that beset the general after he had dismissed Gaubertin will be readily understood. If, like all persons who are free to act or not to act, he had said to himself vaguely: "I will get rid of the rascal!" he had misused his opportunity, forgetting his outbursts of boiling wrath, the wrath of the full-blooded fighter, until the moment when some misdeed should open his eyes to his wilful blindness.

A landowner for the first time, Montcornet, a child of Paris, had neglected to provide himself with a steward in advance; and, after he had studied the neighborhood, he felt how indispensable it was that a man like himself should have an intermediary to deal with so many people of such low condition.

Gaubertin, to whom the passionate outbursts of the two hours' interview had revealed the embarrassment in which the general would surely be involved, jumped on his horse on leaving the salon

where the dispute had taken place, galloped to Soulanges, and consulted the Soudrys.

When he said: "The general and I are to part; whom can we give him for steward without his suspecting it?" the Soudrys understood the idea in their friend's mind. Do not forget that Soudry the brigadier, chief of police in the canton for seventeen years, was supported by his wife with the craft peculiar to the lady's maids of opera-singers.

"He would go a long way," said Madame Soudry, "before he would find anyone so fit as our poor Sibilet."

"His goose is cooked!" cried Gaubertin, still red from his humiliation.—"Lupin," he said to the notary who was present at the conference, "go at once to Ville-aux-Fayes and coach Maréchal in case our gallant cuirassier should apply to him for information."

Maréchal was the solicitor whom his former employer, the general's adviser in Paris, had naturally recommended to the general as his provincial adviser after the fortunate purchase of Aigues.

This Sibilet, eldest son of the clerk of the court at Ville-aux-Fayes, and himself a notary's clerk, without a sou, was head over ears in love with the daughter of the justice of the peace at Soulanges.

That worthy magistrate at fifteen hundred francs a year, one Sarcus, had married a penniless girl, the elder sister of Monsieur Vermut, apothecary at Soulanges. Although an only daughter, Mademoiselle Sarcus, whose face was her whole fortune,

was much more likely to die than live on the fees collected by a notary's clerk in the provinces. Young Sibilet—a kinsman of Gaubertin by a relationship difficult to trace in the intermarrying which makes almost all the bourgeois in a small town cousins to one another—owed to the efforts of his father and Gaubertin a small place in the land-registry office. The unlucky creature had the ghastly happiness of becoming the father of two children in three years. The clerk, who was burdened with five children of his own, could do nothing to assist his eldest son. The justice of the peace owned only his house at Soulanges and an income of three hundred francs. Most of the time, therefore, Madame Sibilet the younger lived at her father's with her two children. Adolphe Sibilet, whose duties required him to travel all over the department, came to see his Adeline from time to time. Perhaps marriage thus understood explains the fecundity of wives.

Gaubertin's exclamation, although easily understood by the aid of this summary of young Sibilet's existence, demands a few more details.

Adolphe Sibilet, an intensely disagreeable person, as will sufficiently appear from this sketch of his character, belonged to the class of men who can reach a woman's heart only by way of the mayor's office and the altar. Endowed with a flexibility comparable to that of a spring, he would yield, with a concealed purpose to resume his own idea; this deceitful disposition resembles cowardice; but

his apprenticeship in business with a provincial notary had induced in Sibilet the habit of concealing this defect beneath a surly manner which simulated a force he did not possess. Many false-minded people conceal their inanity behind an abrupt manner; attack them suddenly and you produce the effect of a pin upon a balloon. Such a man was the son of the clerk of the court. But as men, for the most part, are not of an observant turn, and as three-quarters of those who are postpone their observation until after the mischief is done, Adolphe Sibilet's churlish manner was considered to be the result of rough frankness, of a mental capacity much vaunted by his employer, and of an uncompromising probity of which no probe had ever found the bottom. He was one of those people who are served by their defects as others are by their good qualities.

Adeline Sarcus, a comely young woman brought up by her mother,—who died three years before her marriage,—as well as a mother can bring up an only daughter in a small provincial town, loved the young and well-favored Lupin, the Soulanges notary's only son. In the early chapters of that romance, the elder Lupin, who had his eye upon Mademoiselle Elisa Gaubertin for his son, sent young Amaury to Paris, to his correspondent Maître Crottat, notary, where, on the pretext of learning to draw deeds and contracts, Amaury committed divers foolish deeds and contracted debts, being led astray by one Georges Marest, a clerk in the office and a youth of larger

means, who introduced him to the mysteries of Parisian life. When Maître Lupin went to Paris for his son, Adeline had already become Madame Sibilet. Indeed, as soon as the amorous Adolphe presented himself as a suitor, the old justice of the peace, egged on by Lupin the elder, hastened the marriage, to which Adeline consented in despair.

The land-registry office offers no prospects of promotion. Like many government offices which do not open up a career to their employés, it is a sort of hole in the governmental skimmer. They who make a start through those holes—the Topographical department, Roads and Bridges, Professorships, etc.—always discover a little later that those who are more adroit than themselves, though seated directly beside them, refresh themselves with the sweat of the common people, as the opposition writers say, whenever the skimmer is dipped into the tax levy by means of the machine called the budget. Adolphe, working from morning till night, and earning little by his work, soon discovered the unfruitful depths of his hole. And so he reflected, as he trotted from commune to commune, spending his fees in shoes and travelling expenses, how he could find some stable and profitable employment.

You cannot imagine, unless you squint and have two children born in lawful wedlock, the boundless ambition that three years of privation mingled with love had developed in this youth, whose mind and whose expression squinted equally, whose happiness was unsteady on its legs, not to say lame. The

most important element in secret evil actions, in undivulged dastardly deeds, is perhaps incomplete happiness. Man is more easily reconciled to hopeless misery than to the alternations of sunshine and love with constant showers. Even as the body is made ill thereby, the soul is infected with the leprosy of envy. In petty minds, that leprosy turns to cupidity at once cowardly and brutal, at once audacious and dissembled; in cultivated minds, it engenders anti-socialist doctrines which they use as a stool from which to dominate their superiors. Might not a proverb be made of this: "Tell me what you have, and I will tell you what you think"?

Although he loved his wife, Adolphe was constantly saying to himself: "I have done a foolish thing! I have three balls and chains and only two legs! I ought to have made my fortune before I was married! I can always find an Adeline, and Adeline will prevent my making a fortune."

Adolphe, being a kinsman of Gaubertin, as we have said, had called upon him three times in three years. From the few words he spoke, Gaubertin saw that his kinsman's heart was filled with the clay that longs to be baked by the burning conceptions of legal theft. He maliciously probed that character so well adapted to yield to the exigencies of a scheme, provided that it found pasturage for itself therein. At each visit, Sibilet was in a complaining mood.

"Give me something to do, cousin," he said;

"take me for your clerk and make me your successor. You will see how I'll work! I am capable of levelling mountains to give my Adeline, I won't say a luxurious home, but a modest competence. You made Monsieur Leclercq's fortune; why not give me a place in the bank at Paris?"

"We will see later, I will find a place for you," his ambitious kinsman replied: "meanwhile, acquire all the knowledge you can, for everything is useful!"

The letter in which Madame Soudry wrote to her protégé to come with all speed to Soulanges caused Adolphe, being in the frame of mind we have described, to hurry thither through a thousand castles in Spain.

Sarcus père, to whom the Soudrys pointed out the necessity of bestirring himself in the interest of his son-in-law, went the very next day to call on the general and suggest Adolphe's name to him for steward. By the advice of Madame Soudry, who had become the oracle of the little town, the goodman took his daughter with him, and her appearance made a favorable impression upon the general.

"I will not decide," he said, "without making some inquiries; but I will not look about for anyone else until I have taken pains to ascertain if your son-in-law fills all the necessary conditions. The desire to keep such a charming young woman at Aigues—"

"The mother of two children, general," interposed Adeline, shrewdly, to avoid the general's gallantry.

All the general's proceedings were anticipated with marvellous forethought by the Soudrys, Gaubertin,

and Lupin, who succeeded in securing for their candidate the influence of Gendrin, councillor of the royal court in the chief town of the department and a distant connection of the president of the court at Ville-aux-Fayes; of Baron Bourlac, procureur-général, under whom Soudry the younger, king's attorney, held his office; and of a councillor to the prefecture named Sarcus, a cousin in the third degree of the justice of the peace. Thus everyone, from his solicitor at Ville-aux-Fayes to the prefecture, whither the general went in person, was favorably disposed to the poor clerk in the land-registry, who was such an interesting fellow, they all said. Sibilet's marriage made him as irreproachable as one of Miss Edgeworth's novels, and exhibited him furthermore in the light of a disinterested man.

The time that the discharged steward necessarily passed at Aigues was employed by him in creating difficulties for his former master, as a single one of the little scenes played by him will show. On the morning of his departure he so arranged his movements that he fell in with Courtecuisse, the only keeper he employed at Aigues, which was of sufficient extent to require three.

"Well, well, Monsieur Gaubertin," said Courtecuisse, "so you have had an argument with our bourgeois?"

"Have you heard of that already?" Gaubertin replied. "Well, yes, the general undertakes to order us about like his cuirassiers; he doesn't know the Burgundians! Monsieur le comte isn't satisfied

with my services, and as I am not satisfied with his manners, we discharged each other, almost with fisticuffs, for he's as violent as a whirlwind.—Look out for yourself, Courtecuisse! Ah! my old friend, I thought I should be able to give you a better master."

"I know it," replied the keeper, "and I would have served you well. *Dame!* when we've known each other twenty years! You gave me my place in our poor dear sainted madame's time! Ah! what a good woman! they don't make any more like her. The commune has lost its mother."

"Look you, Courtecuisse, if you choose, you can help us mightily."

"So you're going to stay in the country? Some one said you were going to Paris!"

"No, I shall attend to some business at Ville-aux-Fayes while I'm waiting to see how things turn out. The general has no idea what this region is, and he'll be hated here, you see. I must see what course things are going to take. Do you work easily, he'll tell you to drive the people with a high hand, for he sees where the leak is; but you won't be such a fool as to run the risk of being thrashed, and perhaps something worse, by the country people, for love of his wood."

"He'll discharge me, my dear Monsieur Gaubertin, he'll discharge me! and you know how comfortable I am at the Avonne gate."

"The general will soon get sick of his property," said Gaubertin, "and you wouldn't be long out of your job if he should happen to discharge you. And

then, you see those woods yonder," he added, pointing to the landscape, "I shall be stronger there than the master!"

The conversation took place in a field.

"Those *Arminacs* of Parisians ought to stay in their Paris mud!" said the keeper.

Since the disputes of the fifteenth century, the word *Arminacs*—that is to say Armagnacs, Parisians, opponents of the Ducs de Bourgogne—has remained in use as a term of insult on the outskirts of upper Bourgogne where it is corrupted differently in different localities.

"He will go back there, but he'll go back beaten!" said Gaubertin, "and some day we'll plough up Aigues park, for it is stealing from the people to devote nine hundred acres of the best land in the valley to the gratification of one man!"

"*Dame!* that would support four hundred families!" said Courtecuisse.

"If you want two acres of it for yourself, you must help us to put that villain outside the pale of the law!"

At the very moment that Gaubertin was fulminating that sentence of excommunication, the venerable justice of the peace was presenting to the famous colonel of cuirassiers his son-in-law Sibilet, accompanied by Adeline and her two children, all of whom had come in a wicker-work cart lent by the justice's clerk, one Monsieur Gourdon, a brother of the physician at Soulanges and a richer man than the magistrate. That spectacle, so opposed to the dignity of the

magistracy, is seen in the jurisdictions of all justices of the peace, and in all courts of first instance, where the fortune of the clerk eclipses that of the president, whereas it would seem so natural to give the clerks a fixed salary and diminish by so much the costs of procedure.

Satisfied with the candor and the character of the worthy magistrate and with the attractive appearance of Adeline, both of whom were acting in perfect good faith, for father and daughter were still ignorant of the diplomatic functions imposed upon Sibilet by Gaubertin, the count at once granted the young and interesting household conditions which made the steward's position fully equal to that of a sub-prefect of the first class.

A pavilion built by Bouret to provide a fine point of view and to accommodate the steward, an attractive structure which Gaubertin had occupied,—its architectural style being sufficiently indicated by the description of the Blangy gate,—was assigned to the Sibilets for their abode. The general did not take away the horse that Mademoiselle Laguerre allowed Gaubertin because of the extent of her property, the distance of the market-towns where the produce was sold, and the necessity of surveillance. He allowed Sibilet twenty-five measures of twelve bushels of wheat, three casks of wine, wood at his discretion, an abundance of hay and oats, and three per cent. of the receipts. Where Mademoiselle Laguerre should have received more than forty thousand francs of revenue in 1800, the general

expected, and with reason, to receive sixty thousand in 1818, because of the numerous and valuable purchases made by her. The new steward might therefore eventually make two thousand francs in money for himself. Boarded, fed, warmed, free from taxes, his horse and his poultry-yard costing nothing, he was also allowed by the count to carry on a kitchen-garden with the promise that there should be no haggling over a few days devoted to gardening. Such privileges certainly represented more than two thousand francs. And so, for a man who earned twelve hundred francs in the land-registry, to obtain the stewardship of Aigues was to pass from poverty to affluence.

"Devote yourself to my interests," said the general, "and I shall have something further to say. In the first place, I may be able to obtain for you the tax-collectorship of Conches, Blangy, and Cerneux, by having them set off from the Soulanges collection district. And when you have increased my income to sixty thousand francs net, you shall be still further rewarded."

Unfortunately, the worthy justice of the peace and Adeline, in the expansiveness of their delight, were imprudent enough to confide to Madame Soudry the promise concerning the collectorship, unmindful of the fact that the collector of Soulanges was one Guerbet, a brother of the postmaster at Conches, and allied, as we shall see later, with the Gaubertins and Gendrins.

"That won't be easy, my dear," said Madame

Soudry; "but don't prevent monsieur le comte from trying it; you don't know how easily difficult things are accomplished in Paris. I have seen Chevalier Gluck at madame's feet and she has sung in his operas, although she would gladly have been chopped to pieces for Piccini, who was one of the most amiable men of those times. The dear man never entered madame's house without putting his arm round my waist and calling me his *belle friponne*."

"Ah! so!" exclaimed the brigadier, when his wife told him the news, "does he think he's going to run the whole province, upset everything to suit himself, and make the people of the valley wheel to right and left like the cuirassiers of his regiment? These officers are used to lording it!—But patience! we have Messieurs de Soulanges and Ronquerolles on our side.—Poor Père Guerbet! he little thinks that they're trying to steal the finest roses from his rosebush!"

That phrase in the Dorat style La Cochet got from mademoiselle, who had it from Bouret, who had it from some editor of the *Mercure*, and Soudry repeated it so often that it had become proverbial at Soulanges.

Père Guerbet, the collector of Soulanges, was the funny man, that is to say, the buffoon of the little town, and one of the heroes of Madame Soudry's salon. The brigadier's explosion depicts perfectly the public opinion of the *bourgeois* of Aigues from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, where it had been industriously poisoned by the efforts of Gaubertin.

Sibilet's installation took place toward the end of the autumn of 1817. The year 1818 passed without the general's setting foot in the château of Aigues, for the preliminaries of his marriage to Mademoiselle de Troisville, which took place early in 1819, detained him the greater part of the preceding summer in the neighborhood of Alençon, at his future father-in-law's château, paying court to his fiancée. Besides Aigues and his magnificent city-house, General de Montcornet possessed sixty thousand francs a year in consols, and enjoyed the pension of a retired lieutenant-general. Although Napoléon had named the illustrious *sabreur* a count of the Empire, giving him for arms a shield *quartered, at the top, azure with the desert or and three pyramids argent; second, sinople with three hunting-horns argent; third, gules with a cannon or mounted on a carriage sable, with a crescent or above; fourth, or with a coronet sinople*, with this motto of the Middle Ages: SOUND THE CHARGE! Montcornet knew that he was the son of a cabinet-maker in Faubourg Saint-Antoine, although he would gladly have forgotten it. Now he was dying with longing to be made a peer of France. He counted as nothing the grand ribbon of the Legion of Honor, his Cross of Saint-Louis, and his hundred and forty thousand francs a year. Bitten by the demon of aristocracy, the sight of a blue ribbon put him beside himself. The sublime cuirassier of Essling would have lapped up the mud on Pont-Royal in order to be received by the Navarreins, the Lenoncourts, the Grandlieus, the Maufrigneuses, the

D'Espards, the Vandenesses, the Verneuils, the D'Hérouvilles, the Chaulieus, etc.

From 1818, when Montcornet became satisfied of the impossibility of a change in favor of the Bonaparte family, he caused himself to be advertised in Faubourg Saint-Germain by certain lady friends of his, offering his heart, his hand, his house, his fortune, as the price of an alliance with some great family.

After incredible efforts, the Duchesse de Carigliano discovered shoes for the general's feet in one of the three branches of the Troisville family, that of the viscount who was in the Russian service from 1789, and returned from the emigration in 1815. The viscount, poor as a younger son, had married a Princess of Scherbellof, who possessed about a million francs; but he had impoverished himself by having two sons and three daughters. His family, an ancient and powerful one, included a peer of France, the Marquis de Troisville, chief of the name and arms; two deputies, both having a numerous family and intent upon their own interests in the budget, in the ministry, and at court, like fish around a crust. And so, as soon as Montcornet was presented by the duchess, one of the Napoléonic duchesses most devoted to the Bourbons, he was favorably received. Montcornet asked, as the price of his fortune and a blind tenderness for his wife, to be employed in the royal guard, to be appointed a marquis and peer of France; but the three branches of the Troisville family simply promised him their support.

"You know what that means," said the duchess to her old friend when he complained of the vagueness of the promise. "We can't make the king do it, we can only make him mean to do it."

Montcornet constituted Virginie de Troisville his heiress in the marriage-contract. Completely subjugated by his wife, as Blondet's letter explains, he was still awaiting the first indications of posterity; but he had been received by Louis XVIII., who gave him the ribbon of Saint-Louis and permitted him to quarter his absurd coat of arms with the arms of the Troisvilles, promising him the title of marquis when he should have found a way to earn a peerage by his devotion.

A few days after this audience, the Duc de Berri was assassinated; the Pavillon Marsan carried the day, the Villèle ministry came into power; all the nets spread by the Troisvilles were broken and had to be made fast to new ministerial stakes.

"We must wait," said the Troisvilles to Montcornet, who was overwhelmed with attentions in Faubourg Saint-Germain.

This will explain why the general did not return to Aigues until May, 1820.

The ineffable bliss, for the son of a tradesman of Faubourg Saint-Antoine, of possessing a young wife, refined, intellectual, and of gentle manners, a Troisville in short, who had opened the doors of all the salons in Faubourg Saint-Germain to him, and the manifold diversions of Paris—those diverse delights so completely effaced the memory of the scene with

the steward of Aigues, that the general had forgotten all about Gaubertin, even to his name. In 1820, he took the countess to his country estate to exhibit it to her. He approved Sibilet's accounts and management without scrutinizing them too closely: happiness is not inclined to haggle. The countess, delighted to find the steward's wife an attractive young woman, gave presents to her, and to the children, with whom she amused herself for a moment.

She gave orders for some changes at Aigues to an architect from Paris, for she proposed, thereby making the general wild with joy, to pass six months of the year at that magnificent abode. All the general's savings were exhausted by the changes the architect was ordered to carry out, and by the beautiful furniture sent from Paris. Aigues received at that time the final touch which made of it a unique monument of the varying styles of four centuries.

In 1821, the general was almost ordered by Sibilet to come to Aigues before the month of May. There was important business to be attended to. The lease for nine years at thirty thousand francs, given by Gaubertin to a dealer in wood in 1812, terminated on the fifteenth of that month.

At first, Sibilet, jealous of his reputation for honest dealing, was not willing to have anything to do with the renewal of the lease. "You know, monsieur le comte," he wrote, "I don't drink that wine!" Then the wood-merchant laid claim to the indemnity

he had divided with Gaubertin, which Mademoiselle Laguerre, in her hatred of lawsuits, had allowed to be extorted from her. This indemnity was based upon the destruction wrought by the peasants, who treated the forest of Aigues as if they had the right of cutting wood there. Messieurs Gravelot Frères, dealers in wood at Paris, refused to pay the last quarter's rent, offering to prove by experts that the wood showed a diminution of one-fifth; and they argued from the bad precedent set by Mademoiselle Laguerre.

"I have already," wrote Sibilet, "summoned these gentlemen before the tribunal at Ville-aux-Fayes, as their fictitious domicile, for the purposes of this lease, is with my old employer, Maître Corbinet. I have doubts of a favorable judgment."

"It's a matter in which our revenues are concerned, my love," said the general, showing the letter to his wife; "would you like to go to Aigues earlier than last year?"

"Do you go; I will join you the first fine days we have," replied the countess, who was glad enough to be left alone in Paris.

The general, who was aware of the murderous wound which sapped the flower of his revenues, set out alone, with the intention of adopting stern measures. But the general, as we shall see, reckoned without his Gaubertin.

VIII

GREAT REVOLUTIONS IN A SMALL VALLEY

"Well, Master Sibilet," said the general to his steward on the day following his arrival, addressing him by a familiar title which proved how thoroughly he appreciated the ex-clerk's knowledge, "so we are facing a serious crisis, as the ministerial saying goes?"

"Yes, monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, who was walking with the general.

The lucky proprietor of Aigues was walking back and forth in front of the steward's house, beside a plot on which Madame Sibilet raised flowers, and at the end of which began the extensive meadow watered by the magnificent canal described by Blondet. From there the château of Aigues could be seen in the distance, just as you could see the profile of the steward's house from the château.

"But where is the difficulty?" continued the general. "I will carry on the suit with the Gravelots, a money wound is not mortal, and I will advertise the lease of my forest so thoroughly that I shall find out its true value as a result of competition."

"Business isn't done that way, monsieur le comte," rejoined Sibilet. "If you have no takers, what will you do?"

"I will do my own cutting and sell my wood myself."

"You will be a wood-merchant?" said Sibilet, observing a significant movement of the general's shoulders. "I should like to see you. Let us leave matters at Aigues for a moment. Let us see how it will be in Paris. You will have to hire a wood-yard, pay for a license and rights of navigation, taxes and tolls, pay the expenses of unloading and piling; and, lastly, you must have a responsible agent—"

"It's impracticable!" the general interrupted, hastily, in dismay. "But why should there be no takers?"

"Monsieur le comte has enemies in the country!"

"Who are they?"

"Monsieur Gaubertin, first of all."

"Is that the scoundrel whose place you took?"

"Not so loud, monsieur le comte!" said Sibilet, in alarm; "not so loud, I beg you! my cook may hear us."

"What's that! can't I, on my own land, mention a villain who robbed me?" retorted the general.

"In the name of your tranquillity, monsieur le comte, come farther away from the house!—Monsieur Gaubertin is mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Ah! I congratulate Ville-aux-Fayes! a well-managed town it must be, ten thousand thunders!"

"Do me the honor to listen to me, monsieur le

comte, and believe that this is a very serious matter, that your future here is at stake."

"I am listening. Let us sit down on this bench."

"Monsieur le comte, when you dismissed Gaubertin, he was obliged to go into some business, for he was not rich."

"Not rich! why, he stole more than twenty thousand francs a year here!"

"Monsieur le comte, I do not undertake to justify him," replied Sibilet. "I would like to see Aigues prosper, were it only to demonstrate Gaubertin's dishonesty; but, let us not deceive ourselves, we have in him the most dangerous knave in all Bourgogne to deal with, and he has put himself in a position to injure you."

"How so?" said the general, who had become thoughtful.

"Gaubertin, although he is what he is, supplies about a third of the wood shipped to Paris. As general agent of the wood trade, he directs operations in the forests, the felling, guarding, floating, taking from the water, and loading. Having constant dealings with the laboring men, he controls the prices. He has taken three years to make that position for himself, but he's entrenched in it now as in a fortress. Having become the agent of all the dealers, he doesn't favor one more than another; he has regulated all the different parts of the work for their benefit, and their business is done much better and at less expense than if each of them had his own agent as formerly. In that way, you see, he has so

thoroughly done away with all rivalry that he is absolute master of the awarding of contracts; the crown and the State are his tributaries. The wood cut by the crown and the State, which is sold at auction, goes to Gaubertin's principals; no one to-day is strong enough to dispute it with them. Last year, Monsieur Mariotte, of Auxerre, egged on by the manager of the crown domains, undertook to compete with Gaubertin; in the first place, Gaubertin made him pay all that it was worth; and then, when it came to shipping it, the workmen of the Avonne demanded such high wages that Monsieur Mariotte was obliged to bring men from Auxerre, and the Ville-aux-Fayes men thrashed them. The leader of the coalition and the leader of the row were prosecuted. The prosecution cost Monsieur Mariotte something, for, in addition to incurring the odium of having caused the conviction of the poor people, he had to pay all the expenses, as the culprits didn't own a red sou. A lawsuit against paupers brings nothing but hatred to him who lives near them. Let me give you that maxim, by the way, for you will have to contend with all the poor people in this canton. That isn't all. When everything was reckoned up, poor Père Mariotte, an excellent man, lost money by obtaining the award. He is compelled to pay the whole purchase-money in cash, and sells the wood on credit; Gaubertin is selling wood on unheard-of terms to ruin his competitor; he sells at five per cent. below the market price; thus poor Mariotte's credit has received some heavy blows. Indeed, Gaubertin is

GENERAL MONTCORNET AND SIBILET

"What am I to do?" cried the general, beginning to stride back and forth in front of the bench, his blood boiling.

"Monsieur le comte," replied Sibilet, brutally, "what I am going to say to you is contrary to my own interests: you must sell Aigues and leave the province!"

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TILL

still hounding and worrying the poor man to this day to such an extent that he is not only going to leave Auxerre, but the department, and he'll do well! For that matter, the landowners have long been sacrificed to the dealers, who now make prices to suit themselves, just as furniture-dealers do in Paris at the rooms of the official appraisers. But Gaubertin saves the landowners so much annoyance, that they gain by it."

"In what way?" queried the general.

"In the first place, everything that tends to simplification is of advantage, sooner or later, to everybody interested," Sibilet replied. "And then, too, the landowners have security for their revenues. In the matter of working a farm, that is the principal thing, you see! Lastly, Monsieur Gaubertin is the father of the workingmen; he pays them well and keeps them always provided with work; now, as their families live in the country, the woods belonging to the dealers and to the landowners who entrust their interests to Gaubertin, as Messieurs de Soulanges and de Ronquerolles do, are not plundered. They pick up the dead wood, and that's all."

"That scoundrel of a Gaubertin hasn't wasted his time!" cried the general.

"He's a great man!" rejoined Sibilet. "He is, as he says, steward of the best half of the department, instead of being steward of Aigues. He takes a little from everybody, and that little, out of two million, gives him forty or fifty thousand francs a year. 'The fireplaces of Paris pay it

all!' he says. There's your enemy, monsieur le comte! My advice would be to surrender and be reconciled to him. He is connected, you know, with Soudry, the brigadier of the Soulanges gendarmerie; with Monsieur Rigou, our mayor at Blangy; the municipal keepers are his creatures; thus it becomes impossible to put a stop to the crimes that are cutting down your income. In the last two years, especially, your woods have lost heavily. So Messieurs Gravelot have a good chance of winning their suit, for they say: 'By the terms of the lease, you are to pay for keeping watch of the woods; you don't do it and I am the loser; give me my damages.' That is fair enough, but it's no reason for winning a lawsuit."

"One must know how to accept a lawsuit and lose money, in order to avoid having any more of them!" said the general.

"You will make Gaubertin very happy," rejoined Sibilet.

"Why so?"

"To plead against the Gravelots is to engage in a hand-to-hand fight with Gaubertin, who represents them; so there is nothing he longs for so much as this lawsuit. He says that he flatters himself he can take you up to the Court of Appeal."

"Ah! the knave!—the—"

"If you try to cut your wood," continued Sibilet, turning the dagger in the wound, "you will be in the hands of the workmen, who will demand *bourgeois wages* instead of *dealer's wages*, and who will make you *melt lead*, that is to say, put you in a

position where you will be compelled, like poor Mariotte, to sell at a loss. If you try to arrange a lease, you will find no takers, for you don't expect people will risk for a private individual what Père Mariotte risked for the crown and the State.—And suppose the good man goes and complains of his losses to the government. The government is a gentleman who resembles your humble servant when he was in the land-registry, a worthy man in a threadbare coat, who sits at a table reading a newspaper. Whether the salary is twelve hundred or twelve thousand francs, the official is no more tender-hearted. Speak of deductions, of easier terms, to the treasury as represented by that gentleman! He will answer you with *turlututu* as he mends his quill. You are outside the law, monsieur le comte!"

"What am I to do?" cried the general, beginning to stride back and forth in front of the bench, his blood boiling.

"Monsieur le comte," replied Sibilet, brutally, "what I am going to say to you is contrary to my own interests: you must sell Aigues and leave the province!"

At that the general jumped as if a bullet had struck him, and looked Sibilet in the face with a diplomatic air.

"A general in the Garde Impériale draw back before such hounds! and when madame la comtesse is so delighted with Aigues!—" he said. "I tell you I would rather go and beat Gaubertin on the public

square at Ville-aux-Fayes until he fights with me, so that I could kill him like a dog!"

"Gaubertin is not such a fool, monsieur le comte, as to compromise himself with you. Besides, you can't insult with impunity the mayor of a sub-prefecture as important as that of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"I'll have him put out of office; the Troisvilles will support me, as my income is concerned."

"You won't succeed, monsieur le comte; Gaubertin has very long arms! and you would create fresh embarrassments from which you couldn't extricate yourself at all."

"And what about the lawsuit?" said the general; "we must think of the present."

"I will see that you win it, monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, with a knowing air.

"Good Sibilet!" said the general, grasping his steward's hand. "How will you do it?"

"You will win it in the Court of Appeal by virtue of the rules of procedure. In my view, the Gravelots have right on their side; but it isn't enough to be supported by the law and the fact, everything must be done in regular form, and they have been negligent in respect of form, which always turns the scale. The Gravelots should have formally called on you to give better protection to the forests. It isn't proper to claim indemnity at the expiration of a lease for damages suffered during a nine years' tenancy, there's an article in the lease on which we can rely in that respect. You will lose at Ville-aux-Fayes, you may lose in the royal

court, but you will win at Paris. You will have several costly trials and a ruinous bill of costs. Even if you win, you will spend twelve to fifteen thousand francs; but win you will, if you are bent on winning. The lawsuit won't tend to reconcile you with the Gravelots, for it will be more ruinous for them than for you; you will become their *bête noire*, you will be considered a litigious man, they will slander you; but you will win—"

"What am I to do?" repeated the general, upon whom Sibilet's arguments produced the effect of the most savage blister.

At that moment, as he remembered the blows he had dealt Gaubertin with his crop, he wished he had inflicted them on himself, and all his perplexity was plainly displayed on the burning face he turned to Sibilet.

"What are you to do, monsieur le comte?—There is only one way: come to terms; but you can't make terms yourself. I should seem to be robbing you! Now, when our whole fortune and our only consolation consists in our probity, we poor devils can hardly afford to endure the appearance of rascality. We are always judged by appearances. Gaubertin once on a time saved Mademoiselle Laguerre's life, but he had the appearance of robbing her; so she rewarded him for his devotion, by putting him down in her will for a solitaire diamond worth ten thousand francs, which Madame Gaubertin wears in the middle of her forehead."

The general cast a second glance at Sibilet, quite

as diplomatic as the first; but the steward did not seem to be affected by the distrust enveloped in good humor and smiles.

"My apparent dishonesty would gratify Monsieur Gaubertin so much that he would take me under his protection," Sibilet went on. "So he would listen to me with both ears when I submitted this proposition to him: 'I can get twenty thousand francs out of monsieur le comte for Messieurs Gravelot on condition that they will divide with me.' If your opponents consent, I bring you ten thousand francs; you lose only ten thousand, you save appearances, and the lawsuit is at an end."

"You're a fine fellow, Sibilet," said the general, taking his hand and pressing it. "If you can arrange for the future as well as for the present, I shall consider you the pearl of stewards."

"As for the future," replied the steward, "you won't die of hunger because you cut no wood for two or three years. Begin by having your woods well watched. By that time water will certainly have flowed into the Avonne. Gaubertin may die, he may conclude that he's rich enough to retire; at all events, you will have time to set up a competitor to him; the cake is large enough to be divided; you will find another Gaubertin to oppose to him."

"Sibilet," said the old soldier, marvelling at these various suggestions, "I will give you a thousand crowns if you conclude the matter in that way; as to the balance, we will reflect on that."

"Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, "above all

things, have your woods watched. Go and see what condition the peasants have put them in during your two years' absence.—What could I do? I am steward, I'm not a keeper. To watch Aigues properly, you need a mounted head-keeper and three under-keepers."

"We will defend ourselves. If it's to be war, why, we will fight! That doesn't frighten me!" said Montcornet, rubbing his hands.

"It is a war of francs," said Sibilet, "and that kind will seem to you more difficult than the other. You can kill men, but you can't kill selfish interests. You will fight your enemy on the battle-field on which all landowners fight—*realization!* It is nothing to raise crops simply, you must sell them, and, in order to sell, you must be on good terms with everybody."

"I will have the country people with me."

"How so?" queried Sibilet.

"By being kind to them."

"Be kind to the peasants in the valley, to the petty bourgeois of Soulanges!" exclaimed Sibilet, squinting horribly as the gleam of irony was brighter in one eye than in the other. "Monsieur le comte doesn't know what he is undertaking. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ would perish here a second time on the Cross! If you desire a tranquil life, monsieur le comte, imitate the late Mademoiselle Laguerre and allow yourself to be pillaged, or else make people afraid of you. The common people, women and children, are all governed in the same

way, by terror. That was the great secret of the Convention and the Emperor."

"Oho! so we're in the forest of Bondy, are we?" cried Montcornet.

"Your breakfast is waiting, my dear," said Adeline to Sibilet.—"Excuse me, monsieur le comte, but he has eaten nothing since early this morning, and he has been to Ronquerolles to deliver grain."

"Go, go, Sibilet."

The next morning, the ex-cuirassier was astir long before daybreak and visited the Avonne gate, with the purpose of talking with his only keeper and sounding his disposition.

About seven or eight acres of the Aigues forest lie along the Avonne, and to preserve the majestic appearance of the stream, a line of tall trees had been left growing on each side, almost in a straight line for three leagues. The mistress of Henri IV., to whom Aigues had belonged, being as enthusiastic a hunter as the Béarnais himself, built, in 1593, a single-arched bridge with a shelving ridge, leading from that part of the forest to the much more considerable part purchased for her and situated on the hillside. The Avonne gate was built at that time as a sort of hunting-box; and everyone knows what magnificence the artists displayed in the construction of those buildings, which were devoted to the favorite amusement of the nobility and the crown. Six avenues started from that point, where they met in the shape of a half-moon. In the centre of the half-moon rose an obelisk surmounted by a sun, once

gilded, which bore on one side the arms of Navarre, on the others, those of the Comtesse de Moret. Another half-moon, on the bank of the Avonne, was connected with that at the obelisk by a straight avenue at the end of which could be seen the angular ridge of the Venetian bridge. Between two handsome iron fences, of a style similar to the magnificent one, so unfortunately destroyed, which surrounded the garden of Place Royale at Paris, rose a brick structure, with corner courses of stone hewn, like that used in the château, in diamond-shaped blocks; with a very pointed roof, and windows with architraves of stone hewn in the same fashion. This ancient style, which gave the building a sort of royal character, is adapted only to prisons in cities; but, in the heart of the woods, it derives a grandeur of its own from its environment. A clump of trees formed a curtain behind which the kennel, an old house for falcons, a pheasant-house, and the quarters of the whippers-in were crumbling away, having once been the admiration of all Bourgogne.

In 1595, a royal hunting-party started from that magnificent structure, preceded by the beautiful dogs Paul Veronese and Rubens loved to paint; there were the pawing horses with heavy bluish-black and white glossy quarters, which exist only in the extraordinary works of Wouwerman, and behind came the valets in full livery, and the whippers-in with high boots and breeches of yellow leather, who throng the great canvases of Van Der Meulen. The obelisk erected to commemorate the visit of the

Béarnais and his hunting-party with the fair Comtesse de Moret gave the date below the arms of Navarre. That jealous mistress, whose son was legitimized, was unwilling that the arms of France, her condemnation, should appear thereon.

When the general visited the magnificent monument, the four sides of the roof were green with moss. The stone at the corners, worn away by time, seemed to cry out at the profanation through a thousand open mouths. The disjointed leaden glazing no longer held in place the octagonal panes of the windows, which had a sort of one-eyed appearance. Yellow gillyflowers bloomed between the balusters, the ivy insinuated its white, hairy claws into all the holes.

Everything told of the shameful lack of care, the stamp applied by tenants to everything that they touch. Two windows on the first floor were stuffed with straw. Through a window on the ground-floor could be seen a room filled with tools and bundles of wood; and a cow, exhibiting her muzzle at another, informed visitors that Courtecuisse, in order to save himself the journey from the gate-house to the pheasants' house, had converted the principal apartment of the former into a stable—a room with a recessed ceiling, on which were painted the coats of arms of all the owners of Aigues.

Dirty, black palings disgraced the approach to the house, forming pig-pens with board roofs, and little square yards for hens and ducks, from which the manure was removed every six months. Old

clothes were drying on the bramble-bushes that showed their heads insolently here and there.

As the general approached by the avenue from the bridge, Madame Courtecuisse was scouring a saucepan in which she had just been making some *café au lait*. The keeper, sitting on a chair in the sunlight, was looking at his wife as a savage might have looked at his squaw. When he heard the step of the horse, he turned his head, recognized monsieur le comte, and looked very sheepish.

"Well, Courtecuisse, my boy," said the general, "I don't wonder that other people cut my wood before Messieurs Gravelot; you seem to mistake your place for a canonry!"

"Faith, monsieur le comte, I have passed so many nights in your woods that I've caught a little cold. I am suffering so this morning that my wife is cleaning the saucepan in which my poultice was heated."

"My dear fellow," said the general, "I know of no disease but hunger for which poultices of *café au lait* are the proper remedy. Hark ye, knave! I inspected my forest yesterday and those of Messieurs de Ronquerolles and de Soulanges: theirs are perfectly guarded, and mine is in a pitiful condition."

"Ah! monsieur le comte, they're old settlers in the province, those men! their property is respected. How do you expect me to fight six communes? I care more for my life than for your woods. A man who undertook to keep your woods as they should be kept would get a bullet in his head for wages in some dark corner of your forest."

"Coward!" cried the general, restraining the rage that Courtecuisse's insolent retort kindled in him. "Last night was a magnificent night, but it cost me three hundred francs in the present and a thousand francs for damages in the future. Either things must change, my friend, or you'll go away from here. But every sin is pardonable. Here are my terms: I will give you the amount of all fines imposed, and, in addition, you shall have three francs for every prosecution. If I don't get what I am entitled to, you will get what you are entitled to, and without any pension; whereas, if you serve me well, if you succeed in putting a stop to the thieving, you shall have an annuity of three hundred francs. Think it over. There are six roads," he added, pointing to the six paths; "you must take only one of them, like me, who have not feared bullets; try to choose the right one."

Courtecuisse, a small man of some forty-six years, with a full-moon face, took great enjoyment in doing nothing. He expected to live and die in that gate-house, which had become *his* gate-house. His two cows were supported by the forest, he had his wood, and he cultivated his garden instead of running after delinquents. His negligence suited Gaubertin's purposes, and Courtecuisse had understood Gaubertin. The keeper, therefore, did not give chase to the wood thieves except to gratify his own petty grudges. He persecuted the girls who would not submit to his will, and the people he did not like; but, for a long time, he had hated nobody, being a universal favorite because of his good nature.

A cover was always laid for Courtecuisse at the *Grand-I-Vert*, the wood thieves no longer resisted him, he and his wife received gifts in kind from all the marauders. They carried his wood for him, they trimmed his vine. In a word, he found willing servants in all the delinquents.

Being almost reassured by Gaubertin as to his future and relying on the two acres he was to have when Aigues was sold, he was, as it were, awakened with a start by the concise proposition of the general, who displayed at last, after four years, his true nature as a master who was resolved to be deceived no more. Courtecuisse took his cap, his game-bag, his gun, put on his gaiters, his shoulder-belt with the recent arms of Montcornet, and betook himself to Ville-aux-Fayes at the careless gait beneath which country people conceal their most profound reflections, looking at the trees and whistling to his dogs.

"You complain of the Upholsterer," said Gaubertin to him, "when your fortune is made! Why, the idiot offers you three francs per prosecution, and the fines, you say! Arrange matters with your friends and you can prosecute as many cases as you choose! you can let him have 'em by the hundred! With a thousand francs you can buy the Bâchelerie from Rigou, who's become a bourgeois; you can work for yourself under your own roof, or, rather, make others work and take a little rest yourself. But, listen to this: you must arrange to prosecute none but people who are as bare as eggs. You can't shear a sheep that has no wool. Take what the

Upholsterer offers you, and let him reap the cost, if he likes it. People have all sorts of tastes. Père Mariotte, in spite of my advice, preferred to realize losses rather than profits, didn't he?"

Courtecuisse, overcome with admiration for Gaubertin, returned home burning with the desire to become at last a landowner and bourgeois like all the others.

Upon returning to the château, General de Montcornet told Sibilet of his expedition.

"Monsieur le comte did well," said the steward, rubbing his hands; "but we must not stop half-way on so good a road. The rural guard, who allows our pasture lands to be encroached upon, ought to be changed. Monsieur le comte could easily procure his own appointment as mayor of the commune, and give Vaudoyer's place to some old soldier who would dare to carry out his orders. A great landowner ought to be master on his own estates. See what trouble we have with the present mayor!"

The mayor of the commune of Blangy, an ex-Benedictine, named Rigou, had married, in the year I. of the Republic, the ex-curé of Blangy's maid-servant. Despite the repugnance that a married monk might be supposed to inspire at the prefecture, he had held the office of mayor since 1815, for no one else at Blangy was capable of filling that office. But, in 1817, the bishop having sent Abbé Brossette to serve as parish priest at Blangy, where there had been none for twenty-five years, a violent schism was

at once declared between the apostate and the young churchman, with whose character we are already acquainted.

The war that had since that time been waged between the mayor's office and the vicarage served to make the hitherto despised magistrate a popular favorite. Rigou, whom the peasants detested, because of his usurious schemes, suddenly became the representative of their political and financial interests, which were said to be threatened by the Restoration, and more especially by the clergy.

Starting from the Café de la Paix and going the rounds of all the functionaries, the *Constitutionnel*, the principal organ of liberalism, reached Rigou on the seventh day; for the subscription, taken out in the name of Père Socquard, the proprietor of the café, was contributed to by twenty persons. Rigou passed the sheet to Langlumé the miller, who gave it, in a dilapidated condition, to all who knew how to read. Thus the Paris items and the anti-religious *canards* of the liberal sheet formed public opinion in the valley of Aigues. And so Rigou, like the *venerable* Abbé Grégoire, became a hero. In his case, as in that of certain bankers in Paris, politics covers shameful extortions with the purple of popularity.

At that moment, like François Keller, the great orator, the perjured monk was looked upon as a champion of the rights of the people,—he who, a short time before, would not have walked in the fields at night for fear of falling into a trap in which he

would be accidentally killed. To persecute a man politically results not simply in increasing his stature, but in whitewashing his past. The liberal party, in that respect, was a great worker of miracles. Its doleful organ, which had the wit at that time to be as dull, as slanderous, as credulous, as idiotically treacherous as all the elements that go to make up the mass of the common people, committed as great ravages, perhaps, in private interests as in the Church.

Rigou was enchanted to find in a Bonapartist general in disgrace, in a child of the people raised to eminence by the Revolution, an enemy of the Bourbons and the priests; but the general, in the interest of his secret ambition, so arranged matters as to avoid the visits of Monsieur and Madame Rigou during his first sojourns at Aigues.

When you see at close quarters the terrible figure of Rigou, the stag-wolf of the valley, you will understand the extent of the second capital mistake which the general's aristocratic ideas led him to commit, and which the countess made much worse by an impertinence which will find its place in Rigou's story.

If Montcornet had won the mayor's good-will, if he had sought his friendship, perhaps that renegade's influence would have paralyzed Gaubertin's. Far from that, three lawsuits, one of which Rigou had already won, were pending in the tribunal of Ville-aux-Fayes between the general and the ex-monk. Up to that day, Montcornet had been so

engrossed by his vainglorious projects and by his marriage, that he had forgotten all about Rigou; but, as soon as Sibilet advised him to put himself in Rigou's place, he called for post-horses and went to pay a visit to the prefect.

The prefect, Comte Martial de la Roche-Hugon, had been a friend of the general since 1804; it was a suggestion made to Montcornet by that Councillor of State, in an interview at Paris, that led to the purchase of Aigues. Comte Martial, who was a prefect under Napoléon, and had remained a prefect under the Bourbons, fawned upon the bishop in order to retain his post. Now, monseigneur had already asked several times that Rigou's place should be filled by another. Martial, to whom the state of the commune was well known, was delighted with the general's request, and he was appointed within a month.

By a not unnatural chance, the general, during his stay at the prefecture where his friend entertained him, met an ex-subaltern in the Garde Impériale who was having some trouble about his retiring pension. The general had already, on a previous occasion, befriended the worthy trooper, one Groison, who remembered the fact and recited his grievances to him; he was penniless. Montcornet promised Groison to obtain the pension due him, and proposed that he should take the place of rural guard at Blangy, as a means of paying his debt by devoting himself to his patron's interests. The installation of the new mayor and the new

rural guard took place simultaneously, and the general, as may be imagined, gave some iron-clad instructions to his subordinate.

Vaudoyer, the dismissed guard, a peasant from Ronquerolles, was, like most rural guards, good for nothing but to stroll about, say foolish things, and be coddled by the poor, who ask no better amusement than to corrupt that subaltern authority, the advanced sentry of property. He knew the brigadier of Soulanges, for brigadiers of gendarmerie, exercising as they do quasi-judicial functions in the investigation of criminal matters, are in constant communication with the guards, their natural spies. Soudry sent him, therefore, to Gaubertin, who received his old acquaintance very warmly, and gave him something to drink while listening to his recital of his misfortunes.

"My dear friend," said the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, who knew how to speak to everyone in his own tongue, "this thing that has happened to you is in store for us all. The nobles have come back, the men who got their titles from the Emperor are making common cause with them; they all want to crush the people, to re-establish the old privileges, to take away our property; but we're Burgundians, and we must defend ourselves and send the *Arminacs* back to Paris. Go back to Blangy, you shall be overseer for Monsieur Polissard, who has bought the wood on the Ronquerolles estate. Go, my boy, I'll find something for you to do all the year round. But just remember that it's our wood! Not a theft,

or else it's all up with you! Send the wood thieves to Aigues. But if there is any firewood to be sold, let them buy it of us and never at Aigues. You shall be rural guard again, this won't last! the general will soon get sick of living in the midst of thieves! Do you know that that Upholsterer called *me* a thief! me, the son of the most upright of republicans! me, the son-in-law of Mouchon, the famous representative of the people, who died without a centime to pay for his burial!"

The general fixed the salary of *his* rural guard at three hundred francs, and built a mayor's office, where he lodged him; then he married him to the daughter of one of his farmers recently deceased, who was left an orphan with three acres of vineyard. Groison became as attached to the general, therefore, as a dog to its master. The legitimacy of his fidelity was admitted by the whole commune. The keeper was feared and respected, but as a ship-captain is when his crew are not fond of him; the peasants treated him like a leper. Greeted everywhere by silence or by mockery concealed beneath an appearance of good humor, the functionary was a sentinel watched by other sentinels. He could do nothing against numbers. The delinquents amused themselves by plotting the most unblushing raids, and the old *moustache* fumed at his helplessness. Groison found in his functions all the attraction of a guerilla war and the pleasure of a hunt, a hunt for crime. Accustomed, by long experience in war, to the loyalty which consists in playing with one's cards on the

table, that foe of treachery conceived a bitter hatred for people who were perfidious in their schemes, adroit in their thieving, and who inflicted wounds on his self-esteem. He soon noticed that all the other properties were respected; the offences were committed on the estate of Aigues alone; so he despised the peasants who were ungrateful enough to steal from a general of the Empire, a man essentially kind-hearted and generous, and he soon added hatred to his contempt. But he multiplied himself to no purpose, he could not be everywhere, and his enemies committed their raids everywhere at once. Groison impressed upon his general the necessity of organizing a system of defence on a war-footing, pointing out the insufficiency of his devotion, and making known to him the unfavorable disposition of the people of the valley.

"There's something underneath, my general," he said; "those fellows are too bold, they're not afraid of anything; they act as if they relied on the good Lord."

"We shall see," replied the count.

A fatal remark! For great politicians the word *see* has no future tense.

At that moment, Montcornet was called upon to solve a difficulty which seemed to him more urgent; he needed an *alter ego* to take his place in the office of mayor during his stay in Paris. Being compelled to take for his deputy some man who could read and write, he could find nobody in the whole commune except Langlumé, the tenant of his mill. It was a

detestable choice. Not only were the interests of the general-mayor and those of the miller-deputy diametrically opposed, but Langlumé was involved in divers unsavory schemes with Rigou, who lent him the money necessary for his business or his purchases. The miller purchased the grass from the château pastures for his horses, and, thanks to his manœuvres, Sibilet could sell them to no one but him. All the grass in the commune was disposed of at good prices before that on the Aigues estate, which, being left till the last, underwent some depreciation, although of better quality. Langlumé, therefore, was appointed deputy temporarily, but in France the temporary is never-ending, although the French are suspected of being fond of change. Langlumé, by Rigou's advice, pretended to be devoted to the general; thus he was deputy-mayor at the moment when, by virtue of the historian's omnipotence, this narrative begins.

In the mayor's absence, Rigou, necessarily a member of the communal council, reigned there without contest, and caused the passage of resolutions contrary to the general's interests. Sometimes it was an expenditure of money profitable to the peasants alone, the greater part of the burden falling upon Aigues, which, because of its extent, paid about two-thirds of the tax-levy; sometimes it was a denial of desirable allowances, as an addition to the abbé's stipend, the rebuilding of the vicarage, or the salary of a schoolmaster.

"If the peasants knew how to read and write,

what would become of us?" Langlumé ingenuously asked the general, to justify this anti-liberal decision adverse to a brother of the Christian Doctrine whom Abbé Brossette had tried to install at Blangy.

On his return to Paris, the general, delighted with his old Groison, looked about for some ex-troopers of the Garde Impériale, with whom he could organize his defensive forces at Aigues on a formidable footing. By dint of looking about, questioning his friends and divers half-pay officers, he unearthed Michaud, a former quartermaster in the cuirassiers of the guard, one of those men whom cavalrymen call in military parlance *hard to cook*, a descriptive phrase derived from the camp-kitchen, where refractory beans are not unknown. Michaud selected from among his acquaintances three men fitted to be his collaborators and to become keepers without fear and without reproach.

The first, one Steingel, a pure-blooded Alsatian, was a natural son of the general of that name, who fell in the early days of Bonaparte's successful career, at the beginning of the Italian campaigns. He was tall and strong, and belonged to that class of soldiers who, like the Russians, are accustomed to absolute, passive obedience. Nothing could check him in the execution of his duties; he would coolly have laid hands upon an emperor or the Pope, had such been his orders. He knew nothing of danger. Although an intrepid fighter, he had not received the slightest scratch in sixteen years of war. He slept in the open air or in his bed with stoical indifference. He

said simply at each aggravation of his troubles: "It seems that that's the way things are done to-day!"

The second, named Vatel, a child of the regiment and corporal of *voltigeurs*, gay as a lark, a little inclined to trifle with the fair sex, without religious principle, brave to temerity, would have shot his best friend for you with a smiling face. With no prospects for the future, uncertain what trade to adopt, he detected an opportunity to carry on an amusing little war in the functions he was asked to assume; and as the Grande Armée and the Emperor took the place of religion with him, he swore to serve the gallant Montcornet against one and all. His was one of those essentially quarrelsome natures to which life without enemies seems insipid and dull; in a word, the nature of a solicitor, of an agent of police. So, had it not been for the bailiff's presence, he would have seized La Tonsard and her bundle of sticks in the common room of the *Grand-I-Vert*, snapping his fingers at the law concerning inviolability of domicile.

The third, named Gaillard, was an old soldier, riddled with wounds, who had risen to the rank of sub-lieutenant; he belonged to the class of farmer-soldiers. When he reflected on the fate of the Emperor, everything seemed indifferent to him; but he went as far through recklessness as Vatel did through passion. Burdened with a natural daughter, he saw in the post offered him a means of subsistence, and he accepted it as he would have accepted service in a regiment.

On his arrival at Aigues, whither he repaired in advance of his troopers to dismiss Courtecuisse, the general was stupefied at the audacity of his keeper. There is a manner of obeying, which contains, on the part of the slave, a most withering scorn of the order. Everything, in human affairs, may descend to absurdity, and Courtecuisse had passed the line.

A hundred and twenty-six complaints entered against delinquents,—most of whom were in collusion with Courtecuisse,—and laid before the justice of the peace, sitting for criminal business, at Soulanges, had resulted in sixty-nine judgments in due form, entered and issued, in execution of which, Brunet, overjoyed by such an abundant windfall, had taken all the steps strictly necessary to arrive at what are called, in legal phraseology, declarations of insolvency, a wretched extremity where the power of justice reaches its limit. It is a proceeding in which the bailiff sets forth that the person prosecuted has no property, and is absolutely destitute. Now, where there is nothing to be got, the creditor, like the king, loses his rights of prosecution. These paupers, selected with due care, lived in five neighboring communes whither the bailiff had betaken himself, duly attended by his *praticiens*, Vermichel and Fourchon. Monsieur Brunet had transmitted the documents to Sibilet, accompanying them with a memorandum of costs amounting to five thousand francs, and requesting him to apply to the Comte de Montcornet for further orders.

Just as Sibilet, fortified with the files of documents,

had calmly explained to his employer the result of the orders too summarily given to Courtecuisse, and was looking on with a tranquil air at one of the most violent explosions of wrath that a French general of cavalry had ever indulged in, Courtecuisse arrived to pay his respects to his master and ask him for about eleven hundred francs more, that being the amount of the gratuities promised him. Nature thereupon took the bit in its teeth and ran away with the general, who entirely forgot his count's coronet and his rank; he became a cuirassier and belched forth insults of which he was likely to be ashamed later.

"Ah! eleven hundred francs?" he cried; "eleven hundred lashes! eleven hundred kicks in the—! Do you think I don't know the colors?—Show me your heels or I'll flatten you!"

At sight of the general's violet face and at his first words, Courtecuisse had taken flight like a swallow.

"Monsieur le comte," said Sibilet, gently, "you are wrong."

"I am wrong!—I?"

"*Mon Dieu!* monsieur le comte, you must take care or you'll have a lawsuit with that rascal."

"A fig for the lawsuit! Go and see that the cur takes himself off instantly; be sure that he leaves everything that belongs to me, and make up the account of his wages."

Four hours later the whole country-side was chattering volubly, describing this scene. The general had assaulted poor Courtecuisse, they said, had

refused him what was due him, had kept two thousand francs from him.

The most singular reports of an entirely new tenor concerning the *bourgeois* of Aigues gained currency; it was said that he was mad. The next day, Brunet, who had been acting on the general's account, brought him a summons to appear before the justice of the peace, at the instance of Courtecuisse. The lion was destined to be stung by a thousand gnats; his punishment was only beginning.

The installation of a keeper does not take place without some formalities; he is required to take an oath before the court of first instance: some days passed, therefore, before the three keepers were clothed with their official functions. Although the general had written to Michaud to come with his wife, without waiting until the house at the Avonne gate was ready to receive him, the future head-keeper was detained by the arrangements for his wedding and by his wife's kinsfolk who had come to Paris, so that he did not arrive for a fortnight. During that fortnight, and as a result of the necessary compliance with the formalities, which were attended to with very ill grace at Ville-aux-Fayes, the forest of Aigues was fairly devastated by marauders, who took advantage of the time during which it was watched by no one at all.

It was a great event in the valley, from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, when the three keepers appeared, dressed in green cloth, the Emperor's color, magnificently set up, and with faces that indicated

determined characters, all quick on their legs, agile, and well able to pass their nights in the woods.

Throughout the canton Groison was the only one who gave the veterans a cordial greeting. Overjoyed to receive such a re-enforcement, he uttered some threatening words against the thieves who would soon find themselves hard pressed and placed in a position where they could do no harm. Thus the customary declaration of hostilities was not wanting in that war, which was waged at once briskly and secretly.

Sibilet mentioned the gendarmerie of Soulanges to the general, and especially Soudry the brigadier, as being altogether hostile to Aigues in an underhand way; he impressed upon him the advisability of having a force animated by a proper spirit.

"With a good brigadier and gendarmes devoted to your interests, you will have the whole district in your hands," he said.

The count hastened to the prefecture, where he persuaded the general commanding the division to retire Soudry and replace him by one Viallet, an excellent officer of gendarmes in the capital of the department, whose qualities the general and the prefect praised in the highest terms. The gendarmes of the Soulanges brigade were all transferred to different stations in the department by the colonel of the gendarmerie, a former comrade of Montcornet, and were succeeded by picked men to whom orders were secretly issued to see that the property of the Comte de Montcornet was not injured, and who

were especially warned against being won over by the people of Soulanges.

This last revolution, accomplished with a rapidity which made it impossible to thwart it, spread astonishment throughout Ville-aux-Fayes and Soulanges. Soudry, who considered himself dishonorably discharged, complained loudly, and Gaubertin found a way to procure his appointment as mayor in order to put the gendarmerie under his orders. There was much outcry concerning the tyranny. Montcornet became an object of detestation. Not only was the course of five or six existences thus interfered with by him, but many vanities were wounded. The peasants, excited by remarks let fall by the petty bourgeois of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, by Rigou, Langlumé, and Monsieur Guerbet, postmaster at Conches, believed that they were on the eve of losing what they called their rights.

The general put an end to the lawsuit with his former keeper by paying him all that he claimed.

Courtecuisse purchased, for two thousand francs, a small estate surrounded by the Aigues property, at the outlet of one of the *remises* through which the game passed. Rigou had never been willing to dispose of the Bâchelerie, but he took a malicious delight in selling it to Courtecuisse at a profit of fifty per cent. Thus the ex-keeper became one of his numerous creatures, being held in his clutches by the balance due on the estate, for Courtecuisse paid only a thousand francs down.

The three keepers, Michaud, and Groison thereupon began to lead a genuine guerilla's life. They slept in the woods and scoured them incessantly; they acquired that thorough acquaintance with them which constitutes the science of the forest-keeper, and saves him from wasting his time, as he studies all the means of exit, familiarizes himself with the different species and the localities where each is found, and accustoms his ears to the sounds of all kinds that are heard in the woods. And they notice faces too, pass in review the different families in the various villages of the canton and the individuals composing them, their morals, their characters, their means of existence. A more difficult matter than you might imagine! Seeing them adopt such well-considered measures, the peasantry, who lived upon Aigues, met these shrewd officials with absolute silence and crafty submission.

From the very first, Michaud and Sibilet mutually disliked each other. The outspoken, loyal soldier, the pride of the subalterns of the Young Guard, detested the soft-spoken brutality, the discontented air of the steward, whom he at once dubbed the *Chinaman*. He soon noticed the objections Sibilet put forward to measures radically beneficial, and the arguments by which he justified measures whose success was doubtful. Instead of trying to calm the general's excitable temper, Sibilet, as will have been seen by this succinct recital, constantly stirred him up and urged him to rigorous measures, trying all the while to intimidate him by the multiplicity of

wearisome details, by the extent of petty annoyances, by constantly recurring, unconquerable obstacles. Without divining the rôle of spy and disturbing agent accepted by Sibilet, who, at the time of his installation, determined to select a master between Gaubertin and the general, according to his own interests, Michaud detected in the steward a grasping, evil nature; so that he was unable to account for his apparent probity. The profound hatred which separated those two high functionaries gratified the general, by the way. Michaud's hatred prompted him to keep an eye on the steward, a thing he would not have descended to if the general had asked him to do it. Sibilet flattered the head-keeper and fawned upon him servilely, but was unable to make him depart from an excessively courteous manner which the loyal soldier placed like a barrier between them.

And now, these preliminary details being understood, we can comprehend perfectly the purpose of the general's enemies and the interest of the conversation he had with his two ministers.

IX

MEDIOCRACY

"Well, Michaud, what is there new?" the general asked, when the countess had left the dining-room.

"If you take my advice, my general, we shall not talk business here; the walls have ears, and I wish to be certain that what we say will reach no ears but our own."

"Very good," said the general, "let us walk as far as the steward's, by the path across the meadow; we shall be certain of not being overheard."

A few moments later, the general was walking across the meadow, accompanied by Sibilet and Michaud, while the countess, with Abbé Brossette and Blondet, was walking toward the Avonne gate. Michaud described the scene that had taken place at the *Grand-I-Vert*.

"Vatel was wrong," said Sibilet.

"They proved it by blinding him," retorted Michaud; "but that is nothing. You remember, my general, our plan of seizing the cattle of all our convicted delinquents; well, we shall never succeed in

doing it. Brunet, like his colleague Plissoud, will never give us loyal assistance; they will always find a way to warn the people of a projected seizure. Vermichel, Brunet's *praticien*, went to look for Père Fourchon at the *Grand-l-Vert*, and Marie Tonsard, Bonnébault's sweetheart, left to give the alarm at Conches. And the raids are beginning again."

"A decisive blow becomes more and more necessary every day," said Sibilet.

"What did I tell you?" cried the general. "We must demand the execution of the judgments that call for imprisonment, and which provide for personal distraint for the damages and costs due me."

"These people look upon the law as powerless, and tell each other that you won't dare arrest them," said Sibilet. "They fancy they have frightened you! They have accomplices at Ville-aux-Fayes, for the king's attorney seems to have forgotten the convictions."

"I think," said Michaud, seeing that the general was lost in thought, "that, by spending a good deal of money, you can still save your property."

"It's better to spend money than to resort to harsh measures," observed Sibilet.

"What is your idea?" Montcornet asked his head-keeper.

"It's very simple," said Michaud; "you must surround your forest with walls like your park, and we shall be left in peace; the slightest trespass becomes a crime and leads to the assizes."

"At nine francs a running yard for material alone,

monsieur le comte would spend a third of what he has invested in Aigues!" laughed Sibilet.

"I shall start at once," said Montcornet, "and go and see the procureur-général."

"Perhaps the procureur-général may be of the same opinion as his subordinate," suggested Sibilet, softly, "for such negligence indicates an understanding between them."

"Very well, we must find out if it is so!" cried Montcornet. "If it's necessary to get rid of judges, minister of justice, everybody, down to the procureur-général, why, then I will go to the keeper of the seals, and to the king himself!"

At an energetic gesture from Michaud, the general turned to Sibilet with an "Adieu, my dear fellow!" which the steward understood.

"Is monsieur le comte, as mayor, inclined to take the necessary measures to put a stop to the abuse of gleaning?" asked the steward, bowing. "The harvest is about to begin, and, if we have to publish the decrees concerning certificates of pauperism and forbidding paupers from adjoining communes to take part in the gleaning, we have no time to lose."

"Do so, make your arrangements with Groison!" said the count. "With such people, the law must be strictly executed."

Thus, in an unguarded moment, Montcornet assented to the plan Sibilet had been proposing for a fortnight, and to which he had refused to listen, but which commended itself to him in the blaze of wrath excited by Vatel's mishaps.

"Well, my dear Michaud, what is it?" the count said, in an undertone, when Sibilet was a hundred yards away.

"You have an enemy in your house, general, and you confide to him plans which you ought not to whisper to your forage-cap."

"I share your suspicions, my dear friend," Montcornet replied; "but I won't make the same mistake twice. I am waiting till you are familiar with the steward's duties, and until Vatel can succeed you, before replacing Sibilet. But, after all, what have I against Sibilet? He is punctual and honest; he hasn't appropriated a hundred francs in five years. He has the most detestable disposition in the world, but that's all; otherwise what could be his purpose?"

"General," said Michaud, gravely, "I will find out, for he certainly has one; and if you give me leave, a bag of a thousand francs will worm it out of that scoundrel Fourchon, although, since this morning, I suspect Père Fourchon of nibbling at all mangers. They want to force you to sell Aigues; that scoundrelly old ropemaker told me so. Understand this! from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, there's not a peasant, a petty tradesman, a farmer, a wine-shop keeper, who hasn't his money ready for the day when the quarry is offered. Fourchon confided to me that Tonsard, his son-in-law, had already made his selection. The idea that you will sell Aigues has infected the valley as poison infects the air. Perhaps the steward's house and a few acres in the

neighborhood are the price to be paid for Sibilet's espionage! Nothing is said among ourselves that isn't known at Ville-aux-Fayes. Sibilet is a relation of your enemy Gaubertin. What you have just said about the procureur-général will very likely be repeated to that magistrate before you can get to the prefecture. You don't know the people in this canton!"

"I don't know them, eh?—They're a worthless lot of curs! And do you think I will retreat before such knaves?" cried the general. "Ah! a hundred times rather burn Aigues with my own hand!"

"Let's not do that, but adopt a plan of operations that will defeat the tricks of these Lilliputians. Judging from their threats, they have decided to go to all lengths against you; and so, my general, talking of burning, keep watch on your buildings and all your farm-houses."

"By the way, Michaud, do you know what they mean by Upholsterer? Yesterday, as I was walking along the Thune, I heard some small boys say: 'Here comes the Upholsterer!' and then they ran away."

"Sibilet ought to answer that question; he would be in his element, for he likes to see you angry," replied Michaud, with a distressed air; "but, since you ask me—why, it's a nickname the pirates have given you, my general!"

"For what reason?"

"Why, my general, because of—of your father—"

"Ah! the villains!" cried the general, turning

livid. "Yes, Michaud, my father was a dealer in furniture, a cabinet-maker; the countess has no idea of it.—Oh, if ever—! But, after all, I have made queens and empresses dance, and I'll tell her everything this evening."

"They say that you're a coward," continued Michaud.

"Ah!"

"They ask how you succeeded in saving yourself at Essling, where almost all your comrades fell."

That accusation made the general smile.

"Michaud, I am going to the prefecture!" he cried, in a sort of frenzy, "if for nothing else than to take out insurance policies. Inform madame la comtesse of my departure. Ah! they want war, they shall have it, and I propose to amuse myself by worrying the bourgeois of Soulanges and their peasants. We are in a hostile country, so be prudent! Tell the keepers to keep within the terms of the law. Look after poor Vatel. The countess is alarmed, we must conceal all this from her; otherwise, she would not come here any more!"

Neither the general nor Michaud himself realized their danger. Michaud was so new a comer in that Bourgogne valley that he did not know the power of the enemy even though he saw them at work. The general, for his part, believed in the might of the law.

The law as it is manufactured by the legislator of to-day has not all the virtue that is attributed to it. It does not bear equally on all parts of the country,

it is modified in its application to the point of contradicting its principle. This fact is more or less patent at all times. What historian would be ignorant enough to claim that the most stringent decrees of the ruling power have ever been effective throughout the whole of France? that the requisitions for men, supplies, money, ordered by the Convention, were honored in Provence, in the heart of Normandie, or on the outskirts of Bretagne, as they were in the great centres of social life? What philosopher would dare to deny that a head may fall to-day in one department, while in the next department another head may remain on its shoulders, although guilty of a crime identically the same in kind and often more horrible? We prate of equality in life, and inequality reigns in the law and in the infliction of the death-penalty!

As soon as a city falls below a certain figure in population, the administrative methods applied to it are changed. There are about a hundred cities and towns in France where the laws are enforced in all their vigor, where the intelligence of the inhabitants rises to the level of the problems relating to the public welfare or to the future, which the law seeks to solve; but in the rest of France, where the people understand nothing but the enjoyment of the moment, they avoid everything that tends to impair it. And so, in about half of France, we encounter a force of inertia which defeats all legal action, administrative and governmental. Let us make ourselves clear; this resistance does not concern the things

that are essential to political life. Returns of taxes, recruiting, and the punishment of great crimes certainly do take place; but, outside of certain recognized necessities, all legislation that touches the morals or the selfish interests of the people, or certain abuses, is completely nullified by the general *ill-will*. Even at the moment when this Scene is published, it is easy to discover instances of this resistance, with which Louis XIV. came in contact long ago in Bretagne. In view of the deplorable results of the law concerning hunting, the lives of twenty or thirty men a year, perhaps, will be sacrificed to save the lives of a few beasts.

In France, so far as twenty million human beings are concerned, the law is simply a white paper posted on the door of the church or the mayor's office. Hence the use of the expression, *the papers*, by Mouche as a synonym for the authorities. Many mayors of cantons—we are not yet dealing with the mayors of simple communes—make bags for grapes or grain with the numbers of the *Bulletin of Laws*. As for the mayors of communes, you would be horrified at the number of them who cannot read or write, and at the way in which their documents are drawn up. The gravity of this condition of things, which is perfectly well known to serious-minded officials, will doubtless grow less; but what centralization, against which people declaim so loudly, as they declaim in France against everything that is great and useful and strong, will never accomplish, the power against which it will

always be shattered, is that with which the general was about to come in conflict, and which we must call *mediocracy*.

There has been a great outcry against the tyranny of the nobles; to-day the outcry is against the tyranny of the financiers, against the abuses of the ruling power, which are, perhaps, only the inevitable galls of the social yoke, called contract by Rousseau, constitution by some, charter by others; in one place czar, in another king, in England Parliament; but the levelling process begun in 1789 and resumed in 1830 paved the way for the squint-eyed domination of the bourgeoisie and delivered France over to it. A fact, unhappily too common to-day, the subjection of a canton, a small town, a sub-prefecture by a single family; in short, the picture of the power Gaubertin had succeeded in acquiring in the heyday of the Restoration will, perhaps, denounce that social evil more effectively than any number of dogmatic assertions. Many oppressed localities will recognize their own features in this picture, many people crushed by underhand means will find herein the little public *Here lies*, which sometimes affords consolation for a great private disaster.

At the moment when the general imagined that he was renewing a struggle which had never ceased, his former steward completed the meshes of the net in which he held captive the whole arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes. To avoid long digressions hereafter, it is necessary to set forth succinctly the genealogical ramifications by means of which Gaubertin

enveloped the whole district as a boa-constrictor winds itself about a gigantic tree with such art that the traveller believes that what he sees is really a peculiarity of Asiatic vegetation.

In 1793, there were three brothers named Mouchon in the valley of the Avonne. After 1793, the name valley of the Avonne began to be substituted for valley of Aigues, on account of the popular detestation of the former possessors of the estate.

The oldest of the three, steward of the estates of the Ronquerolles family, became deputy of the department to the Convention. In imitation of his friend Gaubertin, the public prosecutor who saved the Soulanges, he saved the property and lives of the Ronquerolles; he had two daughters, one of whom married Gendrin the advocate, the other the younger Gaubertin, and he died in 1804.

The second, through the influence of his older brother, obtained the post-office at Conches gratis. His sole and only heir was a daughter, married to a rich farmer of the province named Guerbet. He died in 1817.

The last of the Mouchons, having taken orders, was curé of Ville-aux-Fayes before the Revolution and again after the re-establishment of the Catholic religion, and still held the same office in that little capital. He refused to take the oath, and lay in hiding for a long while at Aigues, in the summer-house, under the secret protection of the Gaubertins, father and son. At this time, about sixty-seven years old, he enjoyed general esteem and affection, because of

the similarity between his character and that of the people. Parsimonious to the point of avarice, he was reputed to be wealthy, and his presumed fortune enhanced the respect universally shown him. Monseigneur the Bishop made a great deal of Abbé Mouchon, who was called the venerable curé of Ville-aux-Fayes; and what contributed no less than his fortune to make the abbé dear to the people was their certainty that he had on several occasions refused to accept a splendid living at the prefecture, where monseigneur desired his presence.

At the time of which we write, Gaubertin, mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, found a firm support in Monsieur Gendrin, his brother-in-law, president of the tribunal of first instance. Gaubertin junior, the solicitor with the largest practice before the tribunal and of great reputation throughout the arrondissement, was already talking of selling his office after carrying it on for five years. He wished to succeed his uncle Gendrin in his profession of advocate, when he should retire. President Gendrin's only son was commissioner of mortgages.

Soudry junior, who, for two years, had occupied the principal seat in the prosecuting attorney's office, was a fanatical partisan of Gaubertin. The shrewd Madame Soudry had not failed to strengthen her husband's son's position by opening up boundless prospects for the future by means of a marriage with Rigou's only daughter. The fortunes of the ex-monk and of Soudry, both of which would one day fall to the king's attorney, made that young man

one of the wealthiest and most important personages in the department.

The sub-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes, Monsieur des Lupeaulx, nephew to the general secretary of one of the most important government departments, was the husband designate of Mademoiselle Elisa Gaubertin, the mayor's youngest daughter, whose dowry, like her elder sister's, was fixed at two hundred thousand francs, *not including her expectations!* This functionary did a clever thing unwittingly when he fell in love with Elisa on his arrival at Ville-aux-Fayes in 1819. Except for his pretensions in that direction, which seemed very fitting, he would have been compelled long before to ask for a change of location; but he belonged, by virtue of his hopes, to the Gaubertin family, whose head thought much less of the nephew than of the uncle in the alliance. And the uncle, in his nephew's interest, placed all his influence at Gaubertin's service.

Thus the Church, the magistracy in both its branches, removable and not removable, the municipality, the administration, all four feet of the authorities moved at the mayor's nod.

These are the means by which that power had fortified itself above and below the sphere in which it acted:

The department to which Ville-aux-Fayes belongs is one of those whose population gives them the right to elect six deputies. The arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes, since the formation of a Left-Centre party in the Chamber, had chosen as its deputy

Leclercq, banker of the Wine-Mart, son-in-law of Gaubertin, and recently made a governor of the Bank of France. The number of electors sent by that wealthy valley to the grand college of electors was large enough to assure, by trading if need be, the constant election of Monsieur de Ronquerolles, the patron of the Mouchon family. The electors of Ville-aux-Fayes gave their support to the prefect, on condition that the Marquis de Ronquerolles should continue to be the deputy of the grand college. Thus Gaubertin, who first conceived the idea of this electoral arrangement, was favorably regarded at the prefecture where he was the means of averting much mortification. The prefect arranged the election of three pure ministerialists and two Left-Centre deputies. The two last named, being the Marquis de Ronquerolles, brother-in-law of the Comte de Sérizy, and a governor of the bank, caused the cabinet but little alarm. So that the elections in that department were looked upon at the Ministry of the Interior as very satisfactory.

The Comte de Soulanges, a peer of France, selected for a marshal's baton, loyal to the Bourbons, knew that his property and his woods were well managed and guarded by the notary Lupin and by Soudry; he might well be looked upon as a patron by Gendrin, whose appointment as judge and president he had successively procured, assisted, however, in that, by Monsieur de Ronquerolles.

Messieurs Leclercq and de Ronquerolles sat in the Left-Centre, nearer the left than the centre, a

political position most advantageous to those who look upon political conscience as a piece of clothing.

Monsieur Leclercq's brother had obtained the collectorship of Ville-aux-Fayes.

Just beyond that town, the capital of the valley of the Avonne, the banker, deputy for the arrondissement, had recently purchased a magnificent estate, yielding thirty thousand francs a year, with a park and château, a purchase that enabled him to exert influence over a whole canton.

Thus, in the upper regions of the State, in the two Chambers and in the principal government department, Gaubertin could rely upon protection as powerful as it was actively exerted, and he had never as yet solicited trifling favors or wearied his protectors by too serious requests.

The counsellor Gendrin, appointed president by the Chamber, was the great worker in the royal court. The first president, being one of the three ministerial deputies, and an orator much needed by the Centre, left the conduct of his court to President Gendrin for half of the year. And the counsellor to the prefecture, a cousin of Sarcus, called Sarcus the Rich, was the right arm of the prefect, who was himself a deputy. Except for the family reasons which allied Gaubertin to young Des Lupeaulx, a brother of Madame Sarcus would have been *desired* for sub-prefect by the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes. Madame Sarcus, wife of the counsellor to the prefecture, was a Vallat of Soulanges, a family connected with the Gaubertins; she was

supposed to have *distinguished* Lupin the notary in her youth. Although she was forty-five years old, and had a grown-up son in the engineer corps, Lupin never went to the prefecture without calling upon her or dining with her.

The nephew of Guerbet, the postmaster, whose father was, as we have seen, collector at Soulanges, held the important office of examining magistrate to the court of Ville-aux-Fayes. The third magistrate, a son of Maître Corbinet, necessarily belonged, body and soul, to the all-powerful mayor; lastly, young Vigor, son of the lieutenant of gendarmes, was substitute magistrate.

Sibilet senior, clerk of the court from its first formation, had married his sister to Monsieur Vigor, lieutenant of gendarmes at Ville-aux-Fayes. That good man, the father of six children, was a cousin of Gaubertin's father through his wife, a Gaubertin-Vallat.

The combined efforts of the two deputies, of Monsieur de Soulanges, and of President Gaubertin had procured, eighteen months before, the establishment of a commissionership of police at Ville-aux-Fayes, in favor of the clerk's second son.

Sibilet's oldest daughter had married Monsieur Hervé, a school-teacher, whose establishment was transformed into a college as a result of that marriage, and, for a year past, Ville-aux-Fayes had revelled in the presence of the principal of a college.

The third son of Sibilet, head-clerk to Maître Corbinet, expected to receive from the Gaubertins,

the Soudrys, and the Leclercqs the necessary guarantees to enable him to purchase his employer's office.

The clerk's youngest son was employed in the department of woods and forests, with a promise of the succession to the office of registrar as soon as the existing holder should have served the necessary length of time to entitle him to a retiring pension.

Lastly, Sibilet's second daughter, sixteen years of age, was betrothed to Captain Corbinet, the notary's brother, for whom the place of postmaster had been obtained.

The station for post-horses at Ville-aux-Fayes was in the hands of the elder Monsieur Vigor, brother-in-law of Leclercq the banker, and he also commanded the National Guard.

An old Demoiselle Gaubertin-Vallat, sister to the clerk's wife, held the office for the sale of stamped paper.

Thus, in whichever direction you turned at Ville-aux-Fayes, you found a member of that invisible coalition, whose avowed chief, recognized by all, great and small alike, was the mayor of the town, general agent of the wood trade, Gaubertin!

If you went down from the sub-prefecture into the valley of the Avonne, Gaubertin held sway there, at Soulanges, through the Soudrys, through Lupin, deputy mayor, steward of the Soulanges estate and in constant correspondence with the count; through Sarcus, the justice of the peace, through Guerbet, the collector, through Gourdon, the physician, who

had married a Gendrin-Vatebled. He governed Blangy through Rigou, Conches through the postmaster, who was absolute dictator in the commune. From the way in which the ambitious mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes shed his light abroad in the valley of the Avonne, you can judge of his influence over the rest of the arrondissement.

The head of the Leclercq family was a hat placed for Gaubertin in the deputy's seat. The banker had agreed at the beginning to allow Gaubertin to be chosen in his place as soon as he had obtained the office of collector-general of the department. Soudry, the king's attorney, was to be promoted advocate-general at the royal court, and the wealthy examining magistrate, Guerbet, expected a seat as counsellor. Thus, their occupation of those places, far from being oppressive, guaranteed promotion to Vigor, the substitute magistrate, to François Vallat, the deputy attorney, cousin of Madame Sarcus the Rich, and to all the ambitious young men in the town, and insured the good-will of the candidates' families to the coalition.

Gaubertin's influence was so great, so far-reaching, that the invested funds, the savings, the concealed hoards of the Rigous, the Soudrys, the Gendrins, the Guerbets, even of Sarcus the Rich himself, obeyed his orders. Moreover, Ville-aux-Fayes believed in its mayor. Gaubertin's capacity was vaunted as loudly as his probity and his willingness to oblige; he was entirely at the service of his relations and his subordinates, but expected something

in return. His municipal council adored him. So it was that the whole department blamed Monsieur Mariotte of Auxerre for having vexed the excellent Gaubertin.

Without suspecting their real strength, no occasion to put it forth having arisen, the bourgeois of Ville-aux-Fayes boasted only of having no strangers among them, and they deemed themselves excellent patriots. Thus nothing escaped that shrewd tyranny, which was not recognized as such, but seemed to everyone the triumph of the locality. And so, as soon as the liberal opposition declared war on the Bourbons of the elder branch, Gaubertin, who had been unable to find a place for a natural son, known by the name of Bournier, of whose existence his wife was ignorant, and whom he had kept a long while in Paris, under the eye of Leclercq, learning that he had become proof-reader in a printing-office, procured for him a printer's license, with residence at Ville-aux-Fayes. At the instigation of his protector, the youth undertook the publication of a newspaper called the *Courrier de l'Avonne*, which appeared three times a week and began by taking away the privilege of publishing legal advertisements from the journal of the prefecture. His paper, which was entirely at one with the ministry in general, although belonging to the Left-Centre in particular, and which was of great value to the commercial interests because it published the market prices of agricultural products in Bourgogne, was altogether devoted to the interests of the triumvirate,

Rigou, Gaubertin, and Soudry. At the head of a flourishing establishment, from which he was already realizing a profit, Bournier, protected by the mayor, was paying court to the daughter of Maréchal the solicitor. Their marriage seemed probable.

The only stranger to the great Avonnese family was the engineer in ordinary of the department of Roads and Bridges; so they persistently demanded his removal to make room for Monsieur Sarcus, son of Sarcus the Rich, and everything indicated that that breach in the net would be repaired in a short time.

This formidable league which monopolized all branches of public and private service, which was sucking the blood of the department, which clung to the ruling powers as a sucking-fish clings to the keel of a vessel, escaped all eyes; General de Montcornet did not suspect it. The prefecture congratulated itself on the prosperity of the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes, of which the officials at the Ministry of the Interior said: "There's a model sub-prefecture, everything goes as if it were on wheels! We should be very lucky if all the arrondissements resembled that one!" Family spirit was so well seconded by locality spirit, that a stranger appointed to office there—and the same may be said of many small towns, and even prefectures—would have been compelled to leave the arrondissement within a year.

When the despotic bourgeois cousinry makes a victim, it is so bound and gagged that it dares not

try to complain; it is enveloped in birdlime and wax, like a snail introduced into a hive. This invisible, intangible tyranny has powerful motives for auxiliaries: the desire to be in the midst of one's family, to guard one's own property, the mutual support afforded one another, the guaranties that the administration secures by having its agent under the eyes of his fellow-citizens and kinsfolk. Thus nepotism is practised in the lofty sphere of departmental administration as in the small provincial town. What happens? The district and the particular locality triumph over questions of general interest; the will of the central power at Paris is often nullified; the true state of affairs is disguised, and the province snaps its fingers at the powers that be. In short, when the great public needs are once satisfied, it is clear that the laws, instead of acting on the masses, receive their impress; the people adapt them to themselves, instead of adapting themselves to them.

Whoever has travelled in the south or west of France, or in Alsace, with any other purpose in view than to lie at an inn and to see the monuments and the landscape, must realize the truth of these observations. These effects of bourgeois nepotism are to-day isolated facts; but the spirit of our present laws tends to magnify them. This sordid domination may cause great evils, as some incidents in the drama which was at this time being enacted in the valley of Aigues will sufficiently show.

The system whose overthrow was more injudicious than is commonly supposed, the monarchical

system and the imperial system, remedied this abuse by making certain existences sacred, by classifications, by counterpoises which were so foolishly characterized as *privileges*. Privileges cease to exist the moment that everybody is allowed to climb the greased pole of power. But are not avowed, known privileges preferable to privileges obtained thus by surprise, established by trickery, in fraud of the public spirit we long to see — privileges which resume the work of despotism in an underhanded way and a notch lower than before? Have we overthrown noble tyrants, devoted to their country, only to set up tyrannical egoists in their places? Is authority to lurk in cellars, instead of sending forth its rays in its natural place? We must take thought of these things. The spirit of locality, as it has been described, will gain control of the Chamber.

Montcornet's friend, the Comte de la Roche-Hugon, had been deprived of his office a short time before the general's last visit. His dismissal drove that statesman into the liberal opposition, where he became one of the coryphées of the Left, which party he readily deserted for an embassy. His successor, luckily for Montcornet, was the Comte de Castéran, son-in-law of the Marquis de Troisville, and Madame de Montcornet's uncle. The prefect received Montcornet as a kinsman, and graciously bade him make himself at home as usual at the prefecture. Having listened to the general's grievances, the Comte de Castéran invited the bishop, the

procureur-général, the colonel of gendarmerie, the counsellor Sarcus, and the general commanding the division, to breakfast with him on the following day.

The procureur-général, Baron Bourlac, made famous by the La Chanterie and Rifaël cases, was one of those men who are at the service of all governments, and whose devotion to the government of the day, whatever it may be, makes them valuable. Indebted for his promotion in the first place to his fanatical admiration of the Emperor, he owed the conservation of his rank in the department of Justice to his inflexible character and the conscientious way in which he discharged the duties of his office. The procureur-général, who once relentlessly prosecuted the last remnants of Chouannerie, prosecuted Bonapartists with equal relentlessness. But years and storms had moderated his roughness; he had become, like all old devils, charming in manner and appearance.

The Comte de Montcornet explained his position and the fears of his head-keeper, and spoke of the necessity of making examples and of upholding the cause of property.

The high functionaries listened gravely, replying only with such commonplace remarks as: "Of course the law must be upheld.—Your cause is the cause of all landowners.—We will see what can be done; but prudence is necessary under existing circumstances.—A monarchy ought to do more for the people than the people would do for themselves, if

they were sovereign, as in 1793.—The people are suffering, and they are as much entitled to our care as you are."

The implacable procureur-général blandly put forward divers serious, benevolent suggestions concerning the situation of the lower classes, which would have satisfied our utopians that functionaries of the higher order are already aware of the difficulties of the problem to be solved by modern society.

It is well to state here that at that period of the Restoration, bloody collisions had taken place at several places in the kingdom, because of this very pillaging of the woods and of the unreasonable privileges which the peasants of some communes arrogated to themselves. The ministry and the country did not like that sort of *émeutes* nor the blood that was shed in putting them down, whether with good or ill success. While they realized the necessity of severity, they treated the officials as bunglers when they had subdued the peasants, and they were dismissed if they showed any weakness. So the prefects were inclined to play fast and loose with those lamentable accidents.

At the outset of the conversation, Sarcus the Rich made a sign to the procureur-général and the prefect which Montcornet did not see, and which decided the course of the conversation. The procureur-général had been made acquainted with the state of feeling in the valley of Aigues by his subordinate, Soudry.

"I anticipate a terrible struggle," the king's attorney of Ville-aux-Fayes said to his chief, whom he had called upon for that special purpose. "I know from my spies that they will kill some of our gendarmes. We shall have a wretched prosecution on our hands. The jury won't sustain us when by so doing they will expose themselves to the hatred of the families of twenty or thirty accused men, and they will give us neither the heads of the murderers nor the long terms in the galleys we shall ask for the accomplices. Even by trying the case yourself, you will find it hard to obtain a few years' imprisonment for the most guilty. It is much better to close our eyes than keep them open, if, by keeping them open, we are certain to stir up a collision that will cost some blood, and may cost the State six thousand francs, to say nothing of the expense of keeping the fellows at the galleys. That's a high price to pay for a triumph that will certainly expose the weakness of the law to all eyes."

As he was incapable of suspecting the influence of the *mediocracy* of his valley, Montcornet did not refer to Gaubertin, whose hand kept alive the flame of these constantly recurring difficulties. After breakfast, the procureur-général took Montcornet's arm and led him into the prefect's office. Immediately after that conference, the general wrote his wife that he was going to Paris and should not return for a week. We shall see, by the carrying out of the measures suggested by Baron Bourlac, how wise his advice was; and if Aigues

could possibly escape the *ill will*, it would be by adopting the policy which the magistrate privately advised the general to adopt.

Some minds, greedy for interesting narrative above everything, will charge that these explanations are too long; but it is well to remark at this point that, in the first place, the historian of manners is bound by stricter laws than those which govern the historian of facts: he must make everything seem probable, even what is true; whereas, in the domain of history properly so-called, the impossible is justified by the argument that it actually happened. The vicissitudes of social or private life are attributable to a multitude of petty causes which bear upon everything. The student is obliged to clear away the mass of débris of an avalanche under which villages have been blotted out, to show you the detached stones of a peak, which determined the shape of that mountain of snow. If it were simply a question of a suicide, there are five hundred of them a year in Paris; that form of melodrama has become common, and everyone is ready to accept the briefest statement of reasons for it; but who can be made to believe that the suicide of property ever took place at a time when fortune seems more precious than life itself? *De re vestra agitur*, said a writer of fables; in this instance, the affairs of all those who possess anything are concerned.

Remember that such a league as this, of a whole canton and a small town against an old general, who,

despite his rash gallantry, had come safely through a thousand battles, is formed in more than one department against men who mean to do good there. Such coalitions constantly menace the man of genius, the great politician, the great agriculturist, in a word, all innovators!

This last explanation, political so to speak, not only gives the characters in the drama their true physiognomies, and shows the importance of the smallest details, but it will also throw a bright light upon this Scene, in which all social interests are at stake.

X

A HAPPY WIFE'S MELANCHOLY

About the time that the general entered the carriage to drive to the prefecture, the countess arrived at the Avonne gate, where Michaud and Olympe had been installed eighteen months.

One who remembered the gate-house as it is described above, would have thought that it had been rebuilt. In the first place, the bricks that had fallen or been worn away by time, and the cement that had dropped from the joints, had been replaced. The slate had been thoroughly cleaned, and restored the animation of the architectural style by the effect of the white balusters against the bluish background. The approaches, cleared of obstructions and gravelled, were kept in condition by the man employed to look after the avenues of the park. The window-frames, the cornices, in fact, all the hewn-stone work, had been restored, so that the exterior of the structure had recovered its pristine splendor. The barnyard, the stables, the cow-shed, removed to the vicinity of the pheasant-house, and concealed by clumps of trees,

instead of offending the eye by their unpleasant details, mingled with the constant rustling peculiar to the forest, the murmuring, the cooing, the flapping of wings which make one of the most delightful accompaniments to the continuous melody that nature sings. The spot had something of the wild aspect of an unfrequented forest, and at the same time something of the elegance of an English park. The surroundings of the building, in harmony with its external appearance, were indefinably noble and dignified and attractive; just as the loving care of a happy young wife gave to the interior a very different aspect from that lately impressed upon it by the brutal heedlessness of Courtecuisse. At that moment the season was displaying all its natural splendors. The perfumes of divers baskets of flowers blended with the powerful odors of the woods. From the fields of the park near by, recently mowed, came the sweet smell of new-mown hay.

When the countess and her two guests reached the end of one of the winding paths leading to the gate-house, they saw Madame Michaud sitting just outside the door, working on a layette. In that attitude, thus occupied, the woman added to the landscape an element of human interest which gave it the finishing-touch, and which is so touching in real life that certain painters have tried, mistakenly, to transfer it to their canvases.

These artists forget that the *spirit* of a landscape, when it is well rendered by them, is so grandiose that it overshadows the human figures, whereas, in

nature, such a scene always preserves a due proportion between the person and the frame in which the spectator's eye encloses it. When Le Poussin, the Raphael of France, made the landscape a mere accessory in his *Arcadian Shepherds*, he realized that man becomes small and pitiful when nature is the principal feature of a canvas.

It was August in all its glory, harvest-time at hand, a picture full of simple, strong emotions. It was the realization of the dream of many men, whose unsettled lives, in which good and evil are violently blended, have made them long for repose.

Let us tell in a few words the romance of this household. Justin Michaud did not respond very warmly to Montcornet's advances, when the illustrious colonel of cuirassiers offered him the post of keeper at Aigues; he was thinking at that time of re-entering the service; but during the negotiations and propositions which took him to the Montcornet mansion he made the acquaintance of the countess's first lady's maid. This young woman, who had been placed in the countess's service by worthy farmer folk in the outskirts of Alençon, had some hopes of fortune, twenty or thirty thousand francs perhaps, when all the various inheritances had fallen in. Like many husbandmen who have married young and whose parents are still living, the father and mother finding themselves in straitened circumstances, and being unable to give their oldest daughter an education, had placed her with the young countess. Madame de Montcornet caused Mademoiselle Olympe

Charel to be instructed in dressmaking and millinery, gave orders that she should be served apart from the other servants, and was rewarded for her consideration by one of those unswerving attachments which are so necessary to Parisians.

Olympe was a pretty Norman girl, with fair hair tinged with gold, a little stout, with a face animated by a bright, intelligent eye, and made noticeable by a delicate, curved nose *de marquise*, and by a maidenly manner despite her straight Spanish figure; she presented all the marks of refinement which a girl born to a station just above the common people can acquire in the intimacy her mistress condescends to allow. She was becomingly dressed, her bearing and manners were modest, and she expressed herself well. So Michaud was readily caught, especially when he learned that his charmer would have a considerable fortune some day. The only objection came from the countess, who was unwilling to part with so valuable a servant; but when Montcornet had explained his position at Aigues, the marriage was delayed only by the necessity of consulting the parents, whose consent was soon given.

Michaud, following his general's example, looked upon his young wife as a superior being, whom he must obey in military fashion, without reservation. He found in that quiet, busy, out-of-doors life the elements of happiness which soldiers crave when they leave their profession: enough work to meet the demands of the body, enough weariness to enjoy the charms of repose. Despite his proved courage,

Michaud had never received a serious wound; he had none of the aches and pains which are so likely to sour the temper of veterans; like all really strong men, he had an equable disposition; and so his wife loved him with her whole heart. Since their installation in the gate-house, the happy couple had not ceased to enjoy the pleasures of their honeymoon, in harmony with nature and with the art whose creations surrounded them: a rare circumstance! Things about us are not always in accord with the state of our minds.

The picture at that moment was so pretty that the countess motioned to Abbé Brossette and Blondet to stop, for they could see sweet Madame Michaud without being seen by her.

"When I am walking, I always come to this part of the park," she said, in a low tone. "I enjoy looking at the gate-house and its two turtle-doves as one enjoys looking at a beautiful view."

And she leaned significantly on Emile Blondet's arm, so that he might share sentiments of a delicacy which it would be impossible to describe but which women will understand.

"I would like to be gate-keeper at Aigues!" Blondet replied, with a smile.—"Why, what's the matter?" he added, noticing the sad expression that those words brought to the countess's face.

"Nothing."

It is always when women's minds are full of some important thought that they answer hypocritically: "Nothing is the matter."

"But we may be tortured by ideas which seem trifling to you, but which are terrible to us. I envy Olympe's lot—"

"May God hear you!" said Abbé Brossette, smiling to deprive the remark of its gravity.

Madame de Montcornet became anxious when she detected an expression of dread and sadness in Olympe's attitude and on her face. By the way in which a woman draws her thread at every stitch, another woman divines her thoughts. In truth, although dressed in a pretty pink gown, and with her hair carefully arranged on her bare head, the head-keeper's wife was engrossed by thoughts not in harmony with her costume, with the beautiful day, or with the work on which she was engaged. Her fine brow, her glance, wandering at times over the gravel or among the leaves which she did not see, gave expression with less reserve to a feeling of profound anxiety because she did not know that she was being watched.

"And I envied her! What can make her thoughts so depressing?" the countess asked the curé.

"Madame," Abbé Brossette replied, in an undertone, "tell me why it is that, in the midst of perfect felicity, man is often attacked by vague but sinister presentiments?"

"Curé," observed Blondet, with a smile, "you indulge in true bishop's replies!—'*Nothing is stolen, everything is paid for*,' said Napoléon."

"Such a maxim uttered by that imperial mouth assumes proportions equal to those of society," rejoined the abbé.

"Well, Olympe, what is the matter, my child?" said the countess, walking toward her former servant. "You seem thoughtful, sad.—Can there be any trouble in the house?"

Madame Michaud's expression changed as she rose to her feet.

"My child," said Emile Blondet, in a fatherly tone, "I would like well to know what can cast a shadow on our brow when we are almost as comfortably lodged in this gate-house as the Comte d'Artois at the Tuileries? It's like a nightingale's nest in a thicket! Haven't we the bravest youth in the Young Guard for a husband, a handsome man, who loves us to distraction? If I had known the privileges Montcornet gives you here, I would have quit writing *tartines* to become head-keeper—that I would!"

"It isn't the place for a man of your talent, monsieur," replied Olympe, smiling at Blondet as at an acquaintance.

"What is the matter, pray, my dear child?" said the countess.

"Why, madame, I am afraid—"

"Afraid! of what?" asked the countess, hastily, who was reminded by her words of Mouche and Fourchon.

"Of the wolves?" said Emile, making Madame Michaud a sign she did not understand.

"No, monsieur, of the peasants. I, who was born in La Perche, where there are many wicked people, do not believe there are so many or such

wicked ones as there are in this place. I don't pretend to meddle in Michaud's affairs; but he distrusts the peasants so much that he arms himself, even in broad daylight, if he has to go through the forest. He tells his men to be always on the alert. There are creatures prowling about here from time to time who mean no good. The other day I was walking along the wall near the source of the little stream with the sandy bed that flows into the wood and enters the park through a grating about five hundred yards from here; it is called the Silver spring because of the spangles said to have been strewn on the sand by Bouret.—You know the place, madame? Well, I heard two women who were washing their linen where the brook crosses the Conches path; they didn't know I was there. You can see our gate-house from there, and the two old women were pointing to it.—'See the money they laid out,' said one, 'for the man who took Goodman Courtecuisse's place!'—'Shouldn't they pay a man well who undertakes to torment the poor people like him?' the other replied.—'He won't torment 'em long, there'll have to be an end to it. After all, we have a right to pick wood. The dead madame at Aigues let us do it. It's been going on thirty year, so it's settled.'—'We'll see how things go next winter,' the second woman said. 'My man has sworn by all that's holy that all the gendarmes on earth shouldn't keep us from going to get wood and he'd go himself, and devil take the consequences!'—'*Pardi!* we can't die of cold, and we must bake our bread,' said the one who spoke

first. 'Those people don't want for anything! That beggar Michaud's little wife'll be taken care of, you know!'—In fact, madame, they said frightful things about me, about you, and about monsieur le comte. They ended by saying that first the farmhouses would be burned, then the château—"

"Bah!" said Emile, "washerwomen's tales! They have been robbing the general and they won't rob him any more. Those people are furious, that's the whole of it! Remember that the government is still the strongest power everywhere, even in Bourgogne. In case of an outbreak, they would send a whole regiment of cavalry here if necessary."

The curé, standing behind the countess, motioned to Madame Michaud to keep silent as to her fears, which, without doubt, were due to the power of second sight that true passion gives. Exclusively engrossed by a single being, the heart ends by embracing the whole moral world that surrounds it, and sees therein the elements of which the future is to be formed. In her love, a wife feels the presentiments which, later, enlighten her maternity. Hence certain inexplicable melancholy moods, certain fits of depression which surprise men, all of whom are kept from such concentration of mind by the absorbing interests of life, by their constant activity. All true love becomes for the woman an active contemplation, more or less lucid, more or less profound, according to the individual character.

"Come, my child, show Monsieur Emile your house," said the countess, who had become so

thoughtful that she forgot La Péchina, although she had come on her account.

The interior of the restored gate-house was in harmony with its beautiful exterior. On the ground-floor the architect sent down from Paris with his workmen—a grievance for which the bourgeois of Aigues was bitterly blamed by the people of Ville-aux-Fayes—had arranged four rooms, restoring the original divisions. In the first place, an anteroom with an old-fashioned winding staircase of wood with balusters at the farther end, and behind it a kitchen; then, on each side of the anteroom, a dining-room and the salon with coats of arms on the ceiling and oak wainscoting that had become entirely black. The artist selected by Madame de Montcornet to superintend the restoration of Aigues had taken pains to make the furnishing of the salon correspond with the old wood-work.

At that period, fashion had not imparted an exaggerated value to the relics of past centuries. The armchairs of carved walnut, high-backed chairs upholstered in tapestry, consoles, clocks, high-warp tapestry hangings, tables and candlesticks buried in the second-hand stores at Auxerre and Ville-aux-Fayes, were fifty per cent. cheaper than the furniture at the slop-shops of Faubourg Saint-Antoine. So the architect had purchased two or three wagon-loads of well-chosen antique things, which, combined with articles discarded at the château, made of the salon of the Avonne gate-house an artistic creation in its way. The dining-room he

painted in imitation of natural wood, hung it with so-called Scotch paper, and Madame Michaud hung at the windows white percale curtains with a green border; there were mahogany chairs upholstered in green cloth, two huge sideboards, and a mahogany table. The room was embellished with military pictures, and heated by a porcelain stove, on each side of which were fowling-pieces. These inexpensive luxuries had been talked about throughout the valley as the culmination of Asiatic magnificence. Strangely enough, they aroused the envy of Gaubertin, who, while promising to cut Aigues in pieces, mentally reserved for himself that splendid gatehouse.

Three rooms on the first floor constituted the living rooms of the household. At the windows were muslin curtains which reminded a Parisian of the arrangements and fancies peculiar to bourgeois ideas. There, Madame Michaud, left to herself, had chosen satin-finished wall-papers. On the mantel in her room—which was furnished with the common furniture in mahogany and Utrecht velvet which you see everywhere, and the boat-shaped four-posted bed, from the canopy of which depended curtains of embroidered muslin—was an alabaster clock between two candlesticks covered with gauze and flanked by two vases of artificial flowers under their glass shades, the wedding-gift of the ex-quartermaster. Above, under the roof, the rooms of the cook, the man-servant, and La Péchina had also felt the effects of the restoration.

"Olympe, my child, you haven't told me everything, have you?" said the countess, entering Madame Michaud's room, and leaving Emile and the curé on the stairs; they went down when they heard the door close.

Madame Michaud, warned by Abbé Brossette, in order to avoid speaking of her fears, which were much more vivid than she had told, divulged a secret which reminded the countess of the object of her visit.

"I love Michaud, madame, as you know; well, would you like to have a rival at your side, in your house?"

"A rival?"

"Yes, madame; that blackamoor you gave me to look after loves Michaud without knowing it, poor little thing!—The child's behavior, which was for a long time a mystery to me, has been explained within a few days."

"A child of thirteen!"

"Yes, madame. And you will admit that a woman three months enceinte, who means to nurse her child herself, may well have fears; but to avoid speaking to you about them before those gentlemen, I said a lot of foolish, unimportant things," shrewdly added the head-keeper's generous wife.

Madame Michaud did not really fear Geneviève Niseron, and, within a few days, she had been in mortal terror, which the peasants, from sheer malice, took pleasure in keeping alive, after inspiring it.

"Why, what have you discovered—?"

"Nothing and everything!" replied Olympe, meeting the countess's glance. "The poor child is as slow as a tortoise about obeying me, but as quick as a lizard at the slightest thing Justin asks her to do. She trembles like a leaf at the sound of my husband's voice; she has the face of a saint going up to Heaven when she looks at him; but she has no idea of love, she doesn't know that she loves him."

"Poor child!" said the countess, with a smile and a most ingenuous accent.

Madame Michaud answered with a smile, the smile of her former mistress.

"Geneviève is depressed when Justin is away," she continued, "and if I ask her what she is thinking about, she answers that she's afraid of Monsieur Rigou—nonsense!—She thinks that everybody envies her, and she's like the inside of a chimney-flue. When Justin is beating up the woods at night, the child's as uneasy as I am myself. If I open the window to listen for the trot of my husband's horse, I see a light in La Péchina's room, as they call her, which shows me that she's awake and waiting; indeed, she sits up, as I do, until he comes in."

"Thirteen years old!" said the countess, "the unhappy child!"

"Unhappy?" repeated Olympe. "No. This childish passion will save her."

"From what?" queried Madame de Montcornet.

"From the fate that awaits almost all girls of her age about here. Since I cleaned her up, she isn't

nearly so ugly, there's something odd and wild about her that attracts men. She's so changed that madame would not know her. The son of that vile man who keeps the *Grand-I-Vert*, Nicolas, the wickedest rascal in the commune, has his eye on the little creature; he hunts her like game. Although it's hard to believe that a rich man like Monsieur Rigou, who changes his maid-servant every three years, could have persecuted an ugly girl from the time she was twelve years old, it seems certain that Nicolas Tonsard is running after La Péchina; Justin told me so. It would be frightful, for the people in this region live like beasts; but Justin and our two servants and I will look after the little one; so you needn't be afraid, madame; she never goes out alone except in broad daylight, and then only to go from here to the Conches gate. If she should happen to fall into a trap, her affection for Justin would give her strength and wit to resist, as women who have a preference can resist a man they hate."

"It was on her account that I came here," rejoined the countess; "I did not know how much good I might do you by coming; for the child won't always be thirteen years old. She will improve!"

"Oh! madame," said Olympe, with a smile, "I am sure of Justin! What a man! what a heart! If you knew his profound gratitude for his general, to whom, he says, he owes his happiness! He is only too devoted to him, he would risk his life as in war, and he forgets that he is likely to be a father."

"Do you know, I regretted losing you," said the countess, with a glance at Olympe that made her blush, "but I no longer regret anything, for I see that you are happy.—What a sublime and noble thing love between husband and wife is!" she added, uttering aloud the thought she had not dared to express before Abbé Brossette a short time before.

Virginie de Troisville sat for a moment lost in thought; and Madame Michaud respected her silence.

"Tell me! is the girl honest?" the countess asked, as if awaking from a dream.

"As honest as I am, madame," was the reply.

"Discreet?"

"As the tomb."

"Grateful?"

"Ah! madame, she has fits of humility before me that denote an angelic nature; she comes and kisses my hands, she says things that nearly upset me.—'Can one die of love?' she asked me the day before yesterday.—'Why do you ask me that question?' I said.—'To find out if it's a disease!'"

"She said that?" cried the countess.

"If I remembered all she said, I could tell you many other things!" replied Olympe; "she seems to know more than I do."

"Do you think, my child, that she could take your place with me? for I can't do without an Olympe," said the countess, with a sad smile.

"Not yet, madame, she's too young; but, two years from now, yes.—If it should be necessary for her to go away from here, I could let you know.

There's her education to be attended to; she knows nothing at all. Geneviève's grandfather, Père Niseron, is one of the men who would rather let their heads be cut off than lie; he would die of hunger with money that had been entrusted to him in his hands; that's a matter of faith with him, and his granddaughter was brought up with the same ideas. La Péchina would think she was your equal, for the goodman has made a republican of her, as he says; just as Père Fourchon has made a gypsy of Mouche. I laugh at such foibles myself; but you might get angry at them; she looks up to you simply as her benefactress and not as a superior. What can you expect? she is wild as a swallow is wild. The mother's blood has something to do with it, too."

"Who was her mother?"

"Does not madame know that story? The son of the old sacristan at Blangy, a magnificent fellow, according to what the country people tell me, was drawn in the great draft. He was still a simple gunner in 1809, in an army corps which was ordered to advance hastily from Italy and Dalmatia by way of Hungary to cut off the retreat of the Austrian army in case the Emperor should win the battle of Wagram. Michaud told me about Dalmatia—he has been there. This Niseron, being a handsome man, at Zahara won the heart of a Montenegrin, a mountain girl, who did not dislike the French garrison. Having lost forever the esteem of her compatriots, it was impossible for her to live in the town after the departure of the French. So this

Zéna Kropoli, who was called the Frenchwoman by way of reproach, followed the regiment of artillery. She came to France after the peace. Auguste Niseron solicited permission to marry the Montenegrin, who was then carrying Geneviève; but the poor woman died at Vincennes, from the results of her confinement, in January, 1810. The papers that are indispensable for the legality of a marriage arrived a few days after; Auguste Niseron wrote to his father to come with a nurse from the province, and get the child and take charge of her; he was quite right, for he was killed by the bursting of a shell at Montereau. The little Dalmatian, who was registered under the name of Geneviève and baptized at Soulanges, was an object of interest to Mademoiselle Laguerre, who was deeply touched by her story; it seems that it was the child's destiny to be adopted by the owners of Aigues. At the time, Père Niseron received an outfit of baby linen and assistance in money from the château."

At that moment, the countess and Olympe, from the window at which they were sitting, saw Michaud approach Abbé Brossette and Blondet, who were walking back and forth, talking, in the large circular gravelled tract which followed in the park the line of the half-moon outside.

"Where is she, pray?" said the countess, "you make me long frantically to see her."

"She went to take some milk to Mademoiselle Gaillard at the Conches gate; she should be close at hand, for it's nearly an hour since she went."

"Very well, I will go with the gentlemen and meet her," said Madame de Montcornet, going downstairs.

As she was opening her parasol, Michaud came forward to tell her that the general had left her a widow, for two days probably.

"Monsieur Michaud," said the countess, earnestly, "do not deceive me; something serious is happening here. Your wife is afraid, and if there are many people like Père Fourchon, the country will soon be uninhabitable—"

"If that were so, madame," replied Michaud, laughing, "we shouldn't be standing on our legs, for it's very easy to get rid of us fellows. The peasants are whining, that's all. But, when it comes to going from whining to action, from pilfering to crime, they think too much of their lives, of the fresh air of the fields.—Olympe has been telling you of things she's heard that have frightened her; but she's in a condition to be frightened by a dream," he added, taking his wife's arm and laying it upon his own, as if to bid her keep silent thenceforth.

"Cornevin! Juliette!" cried Madame Michaud; and the old cook's head soon appeared at the window; "I am going a few steps into the woods; keep an eye on the house."

Two enormous dogs, that began to bark, showed that the effective force of the garrison at the Avonne gate was considerable. When he heard the dogs, Cornevin, an old Percheron, Olympe's foster-father,

came out from behind the trees and showed one of the heads that are made only in Le Perche. Cornevin was undoubtedly a Chouan in 1794 and 1799.

Everybody accompanied the countess along that one of the six paths through the forest which led directly to the Conches gate and which the Silver brook crossed. Madame de Montcornet walked ahead with Blondet. The curé and Michaud and his wife talked in undertones of the revelation just made to madame of the condition of the country.

"Perhaps it is providential," said the curé; "for, if madame chooses, we can succeed in changing these people by dint of benefactions and mild treatment."

About six hundred yards from the gate-house, below the brook, the countess espied a broken red jug and milk spilt on the ground.

"What has happened to the little one?" she said, calling to Michaud and his wife, who had turned to go back to the gate-house.

"Such a disaster as happened to Perrette," said Blondet.

"No; the poor child was surprised and pursued, for the jug was thrown to one side," said Abbé Brossette, examining the ground.

"Ah! there are La Péchina's footprints," exclaimed Michaud. "They turn sharply and show that she was suddenly alarmed. The little one rushed toward the gate-house, trying to return."

Everybody followed the footprints pointed out by the head-keeper, who walked along, keeping his eye

upon them, and stopped at a point in the middle of the path, a hundred yards from the broken jug, where the footprints came to an end.

"There," said he, "she started toward the Avonne; perhaps she was headed off in the direction of the gate-house."

"But she's been gone more than an hour!" cried Madame Michaud.

The same fear was depicted on every face. The curé hurried toward the gate-house, examining the condition of the path, while Michaud, guided by the same thought, took the opposite direction, toward Conches.

"*Mon Dieu!* she fell there," said Michaud, returning from the point where the footprints ceased in the direction of the Silver brook, to that where they ceased in the middle of the path, and pointing to a spot on the ground. "Look!"

They could all see on the gravel of the path the imprint of a body lying at full length.

"The footprints going toward the woods were made by somebody in stocking-feet," said the curé.

"They are the marks of a woman's foot," said the countess.

"And down yonder, by the broken jug, they're the marks of a man's foot," said Michaud.

"I can see no signs here of different feet," said the curé, who followed the tracks of the woman's feet to the woods.

"She must have been overtaken and carried into the woods!" cried Michaud.

"But if these are a woman's footprints, it's inexplicable," observed Blondet.

"It must be some joke on the part of that monster of a Nicolas," rejoined Michaud; "he's been watching La Péchina for several days. This morning I stayed two hours under the bridge of Avonne to surprise my rascal, who may have had a woman to help him in his enterprise."

"It is horrible!" exclaimed the countess.

"They think it's a good joke," added the curé, in a bitter and melancholy tone.

"Oh! La Péchina won't let them catch her!" said the head-keeper; "she's quite capable of swimming across the Avonne. I am going to search the banks of the river.—Do you go back to the gatehouse, dear Olympe.—And you, messieurs, and madame as well, walk along the path toward Conches."

"What a country!" said the countess.

"There are good-for-nothing hounds everywhere," observed Blondet.

"Is it true, monsieur le curé," asked Madame de Montcornet, "that I saved this girl from Rigou's claws?"

"All young girls under the age of fifteen whom you are good enough to take in at the château will be rescued from that monster," replied Abbé Brossette. "By trying to entice that child to his house, at a very tender age, madame, the apostate sought to satisfy his lust and his vengeance at the same time. When I took Père Niseron for sacristan, I succeeded

in making the excellent man understand Rigou's real purpose when he talked to him about repairing the wrongs done by his uncle, my predecessor in the living. That is one of the ex-mayor's grievances against me and has increased his hatred of me. Père Niseron solemnly declared to Rigou that he would kill him if anything should happen to Geneviève, and that he should hold him responsible for every attack upon the child's honor. I should not be far out of the way if I should discover in this persecution by Nicolas Tonsard some infernal scheme on the part of that man, who thinks he is at liberty to do anything here."

"Has he no fear of the law, pray?" said Blondet.

"In the first place, he is the father-in-law of the king's attorney," the curé replied. "And then," he continued, after a pause, "you cannot conceive the utter indifference of the cantonal police and the prosecuting attorney's office in regard to these people. Provided that the peasants don't burn farmhouses, that they do no murder and pay their taxes, they allow them to do as they choose among themselves; and, as they are entirely without religious principle, some horrible things happen. On the other side of the basin of the Avonne, helpless old men are afraid to remain in the house, for then nothing will be given them to eat; so they go out to work in the fields as long as their legs will carry them; if they take to their beds, they know that it means death for lack of food. Monsieur Sarcus, the justice of the peace, says that, if all the criminals were

prosecuted, the State would be ruined by the cost of administering justice."

"He's a clear-sighted fellow, that magistrate is!" cried Blondet.

"Ah! Monseigneur is well aware of the condition of this valley and especially of this commune," continued the curé. "Religion alone can repair so many ills, the law seems to me powerless, modified as it is—"

The curé was interrupted by loud shrieks from the woods, and the countess, preceded by Emile and him, rushed courageously in the direction from which they seemed to come.

XI

OARISTYS, THE EIGHTEENTH ECLOGUE OF THEOCRITUS, MOST UNPOPULAR IN THE COURT OF ASSIZE

The sagacity of the savage, which Michaud's new occupation had developed in him, added to his knowledge of the passions and motives of the commune of Blangy, explained in part a third idyll, in the Greek style, which poor villagers like the Tonsards and wealthy men of forty like Rigou translate *freely*, to use the classic term, in the heart of the country districts.

Nicolas, Tonsard's second son, had drawn an unlucky number at the time of the draft. Two years before, thanks to the intervention of Soudry, Gaubertin, and Sarcus the Rich, Nicolas Tonsard's elder brother was mustered out as unfit for military service, because of a pretended affection of the muscles of the right arm; but as Jean-Louis, since that time, had handled agricultural instruments with remarkable facility, there was some gossip in that connection in the canton.

Soudry, Rigou, and Gaubertin, the protectors of the Tonsard family, thereupon warned the wine-shop

keeper that he must not try to obtain the exemption of Nicolas, a tall, strong fellow, from the recruiting law. Nevertheless, the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes and Rigou were so keenly sensible of the necessity of obliging daring men who were capable of doing infinite harm if skilfully guided by them against Aigues, that Rigou gave Tonsard and his son some hope.

That unfrocked monk, to whom Catherine, being excessively attached to her brother, went from time to time, advised her to apply to the countess and the general.

"Perhaps he won't be sorry to do you that service, in order to propitiate you, and that will be so much ground gained on the enemy," said the king's attorney's terrible father-in-law to Catherine. "If the Upholsterer refuses you, then we'll see."

In Rigou's anticipations, the general's refusal would add a new item to the injuries inflicted by the great landowner on the peasants, and would afford the coalition a new claim to Tonsard's gratitude, in case the ex-mayor's cunning mind should suggest to him some method of setting Nicolas free.

Nicolas, who was to go before the Council of Revision in a few days, based little hope on the general's protection, because of the grievances of Aigues against the Tonsard family. His passion, or, more accurately, his obstinate fancy for La Péchina, was so stirred up at the idea of his approaching departure, which left him no time to seduce her, that he determined to resort to violence.

The contempt the child displayed for her persecutor, added to her energetic resistance to his advances, had kindled in the Lovelace of the *Grand-I-Vert* a hatred whose fierceness equalled that of his desire. For three days he had been watching La Péchina; and the poor child knew that she was being watched. There was the same understanding between Nicolas and his prey that exists between the hunter and his game. Whenever La Péchina walked outside the gate a few steps, she saw Nicolas's face in one of the paths parallel to the walls of the park, or on the bridge of the Avonne. She could easily have put an end to this hateful pursuit by appealing to her grandfather; but all girls, even the most ingenuous, by reason of a strange fear, instinctive perhaps, dread to confide in their natural protectors in adventures of this sort.

Geneviève had heard Père Niseron take an oath to kill any man, whoever he might be, who should *touch* his granddaughter; such was his expression. The old man believed the child to be protected by the white halo that seventy years of probity had bestowed upon him. The prospect of terrible dramas to be enacted terrifies the ardent imaginations of young girls sufficiently, so there is no need to go to the bottom of their hearts to find the numerous, strange motives that place the seal of silence on their lips at such times.

When she was ready to start to carry the milk sent by Madame Michaud to Gaillard's daughter at the Conches gate,—their cow having just calved,—

La Péchina did not venture out without first making an examination, like a she-cat just putting her nose outside the house. She saw no signs of Nicolas; she listened to the silence, as the poet says, and, hearing nothing, she thought that the rascal must be at work at that hour. The peasants were beginning to cut their rye, for they did their own harvesting first, so that they might be at liberty to earn the handsome daily wages paid to reapers. But Nicolas was not the man to cry over two days' pay, especially as he was to leave the canton after Soulanges market-day, and to a peasant, becoming a soldier means entering into a new life.

When La Péchina, with her jug on her head, had gone about half-way to her destination, Nicolas clambered down like a wild-cat from the top of an elm where he was hiding among the leaves, and landed like a thunderbolt at La Péchina's feet; whereupon she threw away her jug and ran, trusting to her agility to reach the gate-house. But Catherine Tonsard, who was lying in wait a hundred yards away, stepped out of the woods and collided so violently with La Péchina that she threw her to the ground. The force of the fall stunned the child; Catherine lifted her in her arms and took her into the woods to the centre of a little meadow through which ripples Silver brook.

Catherine, a strong, tall creature, in every point like the young women whom sculptors and painters take for the model of Liberty, as the Republic used to do, fascinated the youth of the valley of the

Avonne by the same exuberance of bosom, the same muscular legs, the same figure, robust and flexible at once, the plump arms, the eye enlivened by a spark of fire; by the haughty air, the hair twisted in great braids, the masculine brow, the red mouth with the lips curved by a quasi-ferocious smile, which both Eugène Delacroix and David d'Angers have so successfully grasped and reproduced. A living image of the common people, the dark-skinned, ardent Catherine flashed insurrection from her bright, tawny eyes, piercing eyes and soldier-like in their insolence. She inherited from her father such a violent temper that the whole family at the wine-shop, Tonsard excepted, feared her.

"Well, how do you find yourself, old lady?" said Catherine to La Péchina.

Catherine had purposely seated her victim on a small mound near the stream, where she restored her to consciousness by a lavish use of cold water.

"Where am I?" the child asked, raising her lovely black eyes, from which you would have said a sunbeam shone.

"Ah! if it hadn't been for me," said Catherine, "you would be dead."

"Thank you," said the child, still half-dazed. "What happened to me?"

"You tripped over a root and fell on your face four paces away like a ball.—Ah! how you were running!—you were tearing along like a lost creature."

"Your brother was the cause of the accident,"

said La Péchina, remembering that she had seen Nicolas.

"My brother? I didn't see him," said Catherine. "For pity's sake, what did my poor Nicolas do to make you as afraid of him as of a man-wolf? Isn't he handsomer than your Monsieur Michaud?"

"Oh!" said La Péchina, with superb disdain.

"Look you, my child, you're laying up trouble for yourself by loving those who persecute us! Why ain't you on our side?"

"Why don't you ever set foot in a church? and why do you steal night and day?" asked the child.

"So you allowed yourself to be fooled by bourgeois arguments!" retorted Catherine, disdainfully, not suspecting La Péchina's attachment. "The bourgeois love us as they love the kitchen, they must have new dishes every day. Where did you ever see a bourgeois who'd marry one of us peasants? See if Sarcus the Rich leaves his son free to marry lovely Gatienne Giboulard of Auxerre, and yet she's a rich carpenter's daughter! You've never been to the *Tivoli*, Socquard's place at Soulanges; come there: you'll see the bourgeois there! you'll understand then that they're hardly worth the money we draw from 'em when we catch 'em! Come to the fair this year!"

"They say the fair at Soulanges is very beautiful," cried La Péchina, innocently.

"I'll tell you what it is in two words," rejoined Catherine. "You're ogled at there if you're good-looking. What's the use of being pretty as you are,

if it isn't to have men admire you? Ah! when I first heard some one say: 'What a pretty slip of a girl!' my blood all turned to fire. It was at Socquard's, in the middle of a dance; my grandfather, who was playing the clarinet, smiled at it. *Tivoli* seemed to me as big and splendid as the sky; why, my girl, it's all lighted up with glass lamps, and you can fancy you're in Paradise. The gentlemen from Soulanges and Auxerre and Ville-aux-Fayes all go there. Since that night, I've always been fond of the place where those words rang in my ears like military music. A woman would sell her soul, my child, to hear that said by the man she loves!"

"Well, yes, perhaps she would," replied La Péchina, with a pensive air.

"Come there, then, and listen to that blessing from a man's lips; you can't fail to get it!" cried Catherine. "*Dame!* when a girl's as pretty as you are, she has a chance of making a fine match!—Monsieur Lupin's son, Amaury, who has gold buttons on his coat, would be quite capable of asking you to marry him! That's not all, either! If you knew the remedy you find there against sorrow! Why, Socquard's mulled wine would make you forget the greatest misfortunes. Think what dreams it gives you! you feel as if you weighed less! Didn't you ever drink mulled wine? Then you don't know what life is!"

The privilege that grown persons enjoy of imbibing a glass of mulled wine now and then excites to such a degree the curiosity of children below the

age of twelve, that Geneviève had once moistened her lips in a small glass of the beverage which the physician had ordered for her grandfather when he was sick. That experience had left in the poor child's mind a reminiscence of a sort of magical sensation, which may explain the interest that she displayed in what Catherine said, and upon which the wicked creature relied to carry out the plan which had already succeeded in part. Doubtless she desired to bring her victim, bewildered by her fall, to that state of mental intoxication so dangerous to girls who live in the fields, and whose imagination, with nothing to feed upon, is only the more ardent as soon as it finds an opportunity for exercise. The mulled wine, which she kept in reserve, was intended to deprive her victim of the last vestige of her wits.

"What is there in it?" asked La Péchina.

"All sorts of things!" replied Catherine, looking to see if her brother was coming; "in the first place, *what d'ye call it* from the Indies, and cinnamon and herbs that change you by enchantment. And you think you have what you like best! it makes you happy! you don't care for anything."

"I should be afraid to drink mulled wine at a dance!" said La Péchina.

"Afraid of what?" rejoined Catherine; "there isn't the slightest danger: just think of all the people there are there. All the bourgeois are looking at us! Ah! those are days that help you to stand lots of hardship! Just to see that and die would be enough for anyone."

"If Monsieur and Madame Michaud would go!" said La Péchina, with flashing eyes.

"Why, there's your grandfather Niseron, you haven't gone back on him, the poor dear man, and he'd be tickled to death to see you adored like a queen. Do you prefer those *Arminacs*, Michaud and the rest, to your grandfather and the Burgundians? That doesn't look well, to deny your own province. And what would the Michauds have to say, anyway, if your grandfather should take you to the fête at Soulanges?—Oh! if you knew what it is to rule a man, to have him mad over you, to be able to say to him: 'Go there!' as I say to Godain, and he goes!—'Do this!' and he does it! And you're made, you see, my dear, to turn the head of a bourgeois like Monsieur Lupin's son.—Why, Monsieur Amaury's in love with my sister Marie, because she's a blonde, and because he's sort of afraid of me. But, as for you, since those people at the gate-house rigged you up, you have the air of an empress."

While adroitly leading the conversation away from Nicolas, in order to banish suspicion from that ingenuous soul, Catherine, with cunning skill, fed it upon the ambrosia of compliments. She had unwittingly laid her finger upon the secret wound of that heart. La Péchina, although she was nothing more than a peasant girl, presented the spectacle of alarming precocity, like many natures destined to end, as they have blossomed, prematurely. Strange fruit of the mingling of Montenegrin and Burgundian blood,

conceived and borne through the fatigues of war, she had, without doubt, been affected by those circumstances. Slender, thin, brown as a tobacco-leaf, small of stature, she possessed an incredible amount of force, invisible to the eyes of the peasants, to whom the mysteries of nervous organizations are unknown. Nerves are not taken into account in the medical system of the country districts.

At thirteen years, Geneviève had attained her full growth, although she was hardly so tall as the ordinary child of her age. Did her face owe to her origin or to the Burgundian sun that topaz tint, sombre and brilliant at once, sombre in color, brilliant in the fineness of the texture, which gives a young girl an air of maturity? Medical science might censure an attempt to answer the question. This premature maturity of the features was redeemed by the animation, the brilliancy, the rich light which made La Péchina's eyes like two stars. As with all eyes that are filled with sunlight and perhaps require powerful protection, the lids were armed with lashes of almost disproportionate length. The bluish-black hair, long and fine and abundant, crowned with its dense masses a forehead shaped like that of Juno of old. That magnificent diadem of hair, the great Armenian eyes and the celestial brow, overshadowed the rest of the face. The nose, although of a pure shape where it joined the face, and graceful in outline, ended in flat nostrils something like a horse's. Sometimes passion filled out the nostrils, and then the face contracted a fierce

expression. Like the nose, all the lower part of the face seemed unfinished, as if the divine sculptor's fingers had lacked clay to continue his work. The space between the lower lip and the chin was so short, that if you took hold of the chin your hand brushed against the lips; but the teeth diverted attention from that defect: you might have attributed souls to those gleaming, polished, well-shaped, transparent bits of ivory, which were readily displayed by a too long mouth, accentuated by sinuosities which made the lips resemble the strange convolutions of the coral. The light passed so easily through the cartilage of the ear, that it seemed pink in the sunlight. The complexion, although reddened by the sun, could not conceal the wonderfully fine texture of the flesh. If, as Buffon says, love is in the touch, the softness of that skin should have been as powerful and penetrating as the odor of the datura. The breast, like the whole body, was appalling in its thinness; but the feet and hands, which were seductively small, denoted a superior nervous force, an organization not easy to destroy.

This combination of diabolical imperfections and divine beauties,—harmonious despite the many discordant features, because a sort of fierce pride tended to produce unity in all its parts,—this challenge of a powerful soul to a weak body as written in the eyes, made the child unforgettable. Nature had attempted to make a woman of this tiny creature, the circumstances of her conception had given her the face and body of a boy. A poet, seeing the strange girl,

would have given her Yemen for her native country; she suggested the *afreet* and *genie* of Arabian tales. La Péchina's face did not lie. She had a soul to correspond to her fiery glance, the mind suggested by her lips embellished with wonderfully beautiful teeth, thoughts worthy her sublime forehead, the fierce temper denoted by her nostrils which seemed always ready to neigh. So it was that love, as we imagine it to exist among the burning sands of the desert, agitated the heart of twenty years in the breast of the thirteen-year-old child of Montenegro, who, like the snow-clad peaks of that country, was destined never to be arrayed in the flowers of spring.

Observing minds will understand that La Péchina, with passion flowing from every pore, was calculated to awaken in wicked natures desires that had been lulled to sleep by satiety; just as, at table, your mouth waters at sight of the misshapen fruit, full of holes and covered with black spots, which gourmands know by experience, and under whose skins nature is pleased to bestow choice flavors and perfumes. Why did Nicolas, the common workingman, pursue this creature, worthy of a poet's pen, when all eyes in the valley took pity upon her as if she had been sickly and deformed? Why did Rigou, old as he was, feel for her a young man's passion? Which of the two was young or old? Was the young peasant as surfeited as the old usurer? Why do the two extremes of life meet in a common, sinister caprice? Does the force with which life ends

resemble the force with which it begins? The disorderly courses of man are abysses guarded by sphinxes; they almost invariably begin and end with unanswerable questions.

We should be able now to understand the exclamation: *Piccina!* which escaped the countess when she saw Geneviève by the roadside, the year before, struck with awe at sight of a calèche and of a woman dressed as Madame de Montcornet was. This girl, who seemed almost an abortion, but who was endowed with Montenegrin force of character, loved the tall, stalwart, handsome head-keeper; but she loved him as children of that age love when they love, that is to say, with the frenzy of a childish desire, with the force of youth, with the devotion which, in true virgins, gives birth to divine strains of poesy. Catherine, therefore, had drawn her rough hands over the most sensitive strings of that harp, all of which were tightened to the breaking point. To dance before Michaud's eyes, to go to the fête at Soulanges, to make an impression there, to write her name indelibly in the memory of her adored master!—What thoughts! To suggest them to that volcanic brain was like throwing lighted brands upon straw that had been exposed to the sun of August!

"No, Catherine," she replied, "I am an ugly, puny thing; it is my lot to live in a corner, to die unmarried, alone in the world."

"Men like *frail women*," said Catherine. "You see me, don't you?" she added, putting out her arms;

"Godain, who's a regular *frog*, likes me, and so does that little Charles, who goes about with the count; but young Lupin's afraid of me. I tell you again, it's the little men that like me and say at Ville-aux-Fayes or Soulanges: 'There's a fine girl!' when they see me pass. But you, why, you'll take the eye of the big, handsome men—"

"O Catherine! if that was only true!" cried the delighted La Péchina.

"Why, it's so true that Nicolas, the finest man in the canton, is mad over you; he dreams of you, he's fairly losing his wits, and all the girls are in love with him. He's a fine fellow!—If you wear a white dress and yellow ribbons, you'll be the prettiest girl at Socquard's at the fête of Notre-Dame, with all the fine folks of Ville-aux-Fayes looking on. Say, will you?—By the way, I was cutting some grass for our cows; I've got a little mulled wine in my flask that Socquard gave me this morning," she said, seeing in La Péchina's eyes the delirious expression that all women know; "I'm not stingy, I'll share with you—you'll think somebody's in love with you."

During the conversation, Nicolas, selecting thick tufts of grass to tread upon, had glided noiselessly to the foot of a great oak that was only a short distance from the mound on which his sister had seated La Péchina. Catherine, who had been looking about from time to time, discovered her brother at last when she went to get the flask of mulled wine.

"Here, you drink first," she said to the child.

"It burns me," cried Geneviève, handing the flask back to Catherine after taking two swallows.

"Little fool! look," said Catherine, emptying the rustic flask at a draught; "that's the way it goes! it's like a sunbeam shining in on your stomach!"

"But I ought to have carried the milk to Mademoiselle Gaillard!" cried La Péchina. "Nicolas frightened me."

"So you don't like my Nicolas?"

"No," replied La Péchina. "Why does he want to follow me? There's no lack of creatures that are willing enough."

"But suppose he prefers you to all the girls in the valley, my dear—"

"I'm very sorry for him," was the reply.

"It's easy to see that you don't know him," retorted Catherine.

As she uttered those ominous words, Catherine Tonsard, with overwhelming rapidity, seized La Péchina by the waist, threw her down on the grass, reduced her to helplessness by putting her arms out straight, and held her in that dangerous position. When she caught sight of her hateful persecutor, the child began to shriek at the top of her voice and kicked Nicolas in the stomach with a force that sent him reeling five yards away; then she threw herself over like an acrobat with a dexterity that upset Catherine's calculations, and sprang to her feet to fly. Catherine, who was still on the ground, put out her hand, and caught La Péchina by the foot, so that she fell headlong, face foremost, to the ground.

The violent fall checked the brave Montenegrin's shrieks. Nicolas, who, notwithstanding the violence of the blow he had received, had recovered himself, ran up in a furious passion and tried to seize his victim. In that extremity, although dizzy from the effects of the wine, the child seized Nicolas by the throat and pressed it in a vice-like grasp.

"She's strangling me!—help, Catherine!" cried Nicolas, in a voice that could hardly make its way through the larynx.

La Péchina meanwhile was uttering piercing shrieks; Catherine tried to stifle them by putting her hand over the child's mouth, but she bit it till the blood came. Just at that moment, Blondet, the countess, and the curé appeared at the edge of the woods.

"Here are the bourgeois from Aigues," said Catherine, helping Geneviève to rise.

"Do you want to live?" said Nicolas Tonsard to the child, in a hoarse voice.

"Why?" said La Péchina.

"Tell them we were fooling and I'll forgive you," Nicolas replied, with a threatening air.

"Hussy! will you say so?" exclaimed Catherine, whose glance was even more terrible than Nicolas's murderous threat.

"Yes, if you'll leave me in peace," replied the child. "Anyway, I'll never come out again without my scissors."

"You'll hold your tongue or I'll kick you into the Avonne," said the ferocious Catherine.

"You are monsters!" cried the curé; "you deserve to be arrested and sent to the assizes."

"Bah! what do you people do in your salons?" demanded Nicolas, looking at the countess and Blondet, who shuddered at his glance. "You play, don't you? Very good, the fields are ours, we can't work all the time, so we were playing!—Ask my sister and La Péchina."

"How do you fight, then, if that's the way you play?" cried Blondet.

Nicolas cast a murderous glance at the speaker.

"Speak up!" said Catherine, grasping La Péchina's forearm and squeezing it so as to leave a blue bracelet upon it, "weren't we amusing ourselves?"

"Yes, madame, we were amusing ourselves," said the child, exhausted by her unusual exertions and swaying from side to side as if she were going to faint.

"You hear her, madame," said Catherine, insolently darting at the countess one of the glances which, as between woman and woman, are equivalent to blows with a dagger.

She took her brother's arm and they both walked away without any self-deception as to the ideas they had inspired in the three new arrivals on the scene. Nicholas turned twice, and twice he met the gaze of Blondet, who eyed with interest the tall rascal, five feet eight inches in height, of a hale, ruddy complexion, with black, curly hair, broad shoulders, and a face which, although mild enough in expression,

had certain lines upon the lips and around the mouth in which could be divined the cruelty peculiar to voluptuaries and sluggards. Catherine flirted her blue and white striped skirt with a sort of malicious coquetry.

"Cain and his wife!" said Blondet to the curé.

"You don't know how well you have guessed," replied Abbé Brossette.

"O monsieur le curé, what will they do to me?" said La Péchina, when the brother and sister were so far away that they could not hear her voice.

The countess, who was as white as her handkerchief, was so thoroughly overcome that she heard neither Blondet nor the curé nor La Péchina.

"It's enough to make one fly from an earthly paradise," she said, at last. "But, before everything, we must save the child from their claws."

"You were right, the child is a poem, a living poem!" said Blondet, in an undertone, to the countess.

At that moment, the Montenegrin was in the condition in which the body and soul smoke, so to speak, after the fire of an anger which has caused all the intellectual and physical qualities to put forth all their force. It is a supremely splendid, incredible sight, which is displayed only under the pressure of some fanaticism, that of resistance or of victory, whether in love or martyrdom. She had started from the house with a dress of alternate brown and yellow stripes, with a tucker which she ironed herself, having risen early for the purpose; and she had

not yet noticed the disordered condition of her dirt-begrimed dress and rumpled tucker. Feeling that her hair had fallen, she looked about for her comb. Just as she made that first troubled gesture, Michaud, also attracted by the shrieks, appeared upon the scene. When she saw her god, La Péchina recovered all her courage.

"He didn't even touch me, Monsieur Michaud!" she exclaimed.

The exclamation, and the glance and gesture which were an eloquent commentary upon it, told Blondet and the curé more in a single instant than Madame Michaud had told the countess concerning the strange girl's passion for the head-keeper, who had no suspicion of it.

"The villain!" cried Michaud.

And with the involuntary, impotent gesture in which fools and wise men alike indulge, he shook his fist at Nicolas, whose tall figure cast a shadow upon the woods, which he was just entering with his sister.

"So you weren't playing, after all?" said Abbé Brossette, with a shrewd glance at La Péchina.

"Don't torment her," said the countess; "let us go home."

La Péchina, although exhausted, found in her passion sufficient strength to enable her to walk; her adored master's eye was upon her! The countess followed Michaud into one of the paths known only to poachers and keepers, where there was room for only two to walk abreast, but which led straight to the Avonne gate.

"Michaud," she said, when they were in the woods, "we must find some way of ridding the neighborhood of that wicked creature, for the poor child's life may be in danger."

"In the first place," Michaud replied, "Geneviève shall not leave the house; my wife will take in Vatel's nephew, who looks after the avenues in the park; we will fill his place with a young man from my wife's province, for we mustn't hire anybody at Aigues now of whom we're not sure. With Gounod in the house, and Cornevin, the old foster-father, the cows will be well tended, and La Péchina won't go out unless somebody's with her."

"I will tell monsieur to indemnify you for the extra expense," said the countess; "but that doesn't get rid of Nicolas. How shall we do that?"

"There's a very simple way, all prepared for us," replied Michaud. "Nicolas has to go before the Council of Revision in a few days; instead of soliciting his release, my general, upon whose influence the Tonsards rely, has only to lodge a complaint against him."

"If necessary," said the countess, "I will go myself to see my cousin De Castéran, our prefect; but I tremble to think of what may happen between now and then."

These words were exchanged at the end of the path where it opened into the half-moon. As she reached the edge of the ditch, the countess could not restrain a sharp exclamation; Michaud stepped forward to help her, supposing that a thorn had

wounded her; but he started back at the sight that met his eyes.

Marie Tonsard and Bonnébault were sitting on the sloping bank of the ditch, apparently talking; but they had doubtless hidden there to listen. Evidently they had left their place in the woods when they heard people coming and recognized bourgeois voices.

After six years' service in the cavalry, Bonnébault, a tall, slim fellow, had returned to Conches a few months before, with a definitive discharge which he owed to his bad conduct; his example would have ruined the best soldiers. He wore moustaches and a tuft on his chin, a detail which, added to the prestige of the carriage that soldiers acquire in life in barracks, had made Bonnébault the darling of the girls in the valley. In true soldier-fashion, he wore his hair very short behind and curled on top of his head, the ends brushed coquettishly upward, and wore his forage-cap tilted jauntily over one ear. In short, compared with the peasants, who were almost all in rags like Mouche and Fourchon, he seemed superb in canvas trousers, boots, and a little short jacket. Those effects, purchased at the time of his discharge, were suggestive of disbandment and a country life; but the cock of the valley had some better clothes for holidays. He lived, let us say at once, on the liberality of his sweethearts, which barely sufficed for his libations, the debauchery, the evil courses of all sorts into which the frequenters of the Café de la Paix were drawn.

Despite his round, expressionless face, which was not unattractive at first sight, there was an indefinable sinister something about the rascal's appearance. He had a cast in his eye, that is to say, one of his eyes did not follow the movements of the other; he did not squint, but his eyes were not always together, to borrow one of the technical terms of painting. That defect, although slight, gave to his glance a lowering expression, which was disquieting in that it harmonized with a movement of the forehead and eyebrows which disclosed a vein of cowardice in his character, a tendency to degradation.

It is the same with cowardice as with courage: there are several varieties. Bonnébault, who would have fought as well as the bravest soldier, was weak before his vices and his whims. Lazy as a lizard, active only in respect to what pleased him, utterly devoid of delicacy, at once proud and base, capable of anything and indifferent to everything, the happiness of this *breaker of hearts and plates*, to use a military expression, consisted in injuring somebody or destroying something. In the country districts the example of such a character is as disastrous as in a regiment. Like Tonsard and Fourchon, Bonnébault's ambition was to live well and do nothing. And so he had *drawn his plan*, to use an expression taken from the Vermichel and Fourchon dictionary. While making the most of his swagger, with increasing success, and of his talents at billiards with varying fortunes, he flattered himself, in his capacity of

habitué of the Café de la Paix, that he would some day marry Mademoiselle Aglaé Socquard, only daughter of Père Socquard, the proprietor of the establishment, which, to compare small things with great, was to Soulanges what Ranelagh is to the Bois de Boulogne.

To embrace the career of proprietor of a café, to become manager of the public balls,—that noble destiny seemed in truth to be the marshal's baton of a sluggard. The morals, the mode of life, the character we have described were written so plainly in filthy letters on the face of this libertine of low station, that the countess uttered an exclamation at the sight of the couple, who made as painful an impression upon her as if they had been serpents.

Marie was mad over Bonnébault and would have stolen for him. That moustache, that martial jauntiness, that vulgar, dandified manner went to her heart, as the bearing, the manners, the pretty ways of a De Marsay attract a lovely Parisian. Each social sphere has its own distinguishing marks. The jealous Marie rebuffed Amaury, the other village coxcomb: she was bent upon being Madame Bonnébault!

"Ohé! ohé! are you people coming?" cried Catherine and Nicolas, in the distance, when they spied Marie and Bonnébault.

Their shrill voices rang through the woods like the war-whoop of savages.

Michaud shuddered when he saw the two, for he keenly repented having spoken as he did. If Marie

and Bonnébault had overheard the conversation, nothing but disaster could result. This incident, apparently of trivial importance, was likely to have a decisive influence in the irritating condition of affairs as between Aigues and the peasantry, just as, in a battle, the question of victory or defeat may be decided by a little stream which a shepherd leaps with his feet close together, but by which the artillery is held in check.

With a gallant courtesy to the countess, Bonnébault took Marie's arm with a killing air and walked triumphantly away.

"That's the Key of Hearts of the valley," said Michaud, in an undertone, to the countess, making use of the camp term for a Don Juan. "He's a very dangerous man. When he has lost twenty francs at billiards, you could induce him to murder Rigou!—His eye turns as readily to a crime as to pleasure."

"I have seen too much for to-day," rejoined the countess, taking Emile's arm; "let us return, messieurs."

She bowed sadly to Madame Michaud when she saw that La Péchina was safely inside the gatehouse. Olympe's melancholy had infected her.

"How now, madame," said Abbé Brossette, "has the difficulty of doing good here discouraged your purpose to try it?" For five years now I have slept on a straw pallet, lived in an unfurnished vicarage, said mass with no one to listen, preached without a congregation, performed the duties of priest, without fees

or additions to my stipend, and have lived on the six hundred francs I receive from the State, without asking any favors from the bishop, and I give away a third of that in charity.—But I do not despair! If you knew what my winters are here, you would understand the full meaning of what I say! I have nothing to warm me except the thought of saving this valley, of winning it back for God! It is not a question of ourselves, madame, but of the future. If we are ordained in order to say to the poor: 'Learn how to be poor!' that is to say: 'Suffer, be resigned, and work!' we must also say to the rich: 'Learn how to be rich!' that is to say: 'Be judicious in well-doing, devout, and worthy of the place God has assigned you!' Ah! madame, you are only trustees of the power fortune gives, and if you do not fulfil its duties you will not transmit it to your children as you received it! You are despoiling your posterity! If you continue the selfish methods of the singer, who unquestionably caused, by her indifference, the evil whose extent terrifies you, you will see again the scaffolds on which your predecessors died for the sins of their fathers. To do good obscurely, in a corner, as Rigou, for example, does harm!—ah! that is the kind of prayer in action which gives God pleasure! If three persons in every commune were determined to do right, France, our beautiful country, would be rescued from the abyss into which we are rushing, and toward which we are impelled by religious indifference as regards everything that is not ourselves!—

Change yourselves first, change your morals, and then you will change your laws!"

Although deeply moved by this outburst of genuinely Catholic charity, the countess replied with the fatal *We will see!* of the rich, which contains a sufficient promise to enable them to put aside an appeal to their purse, and which permits them later to stand with folded arms in the face of any sort of a disaster, on the plea that it is an accomplished fact.

When he heard that phrase, Abbé Brossette bowed to Madame de Montcornet and took a path that led directly to the Blangy gate.

"So Belshazzar's Feast will be the eternal symbol of the last days of a caste, of an oligarchy, of a ruling power!" he said to himself as he walked away. "O my God! if it be Thy blessed will to unchain the poor like a torrent, to transform the social fabric, then I understand why Thou abandonest the rich to their blindness!"

XII

HOW THE WINE-SHOP IS THE PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT

Old Mère Tonsard, by yelling at the top of her voice, had attracted some few persons from Blangy, who were curious to learn what was going on at the *Grand-I-Vert;* for the distance between the village and the wine-shop was no greater than that between the wine-shop and the Blangy gate of the park. One of those curious persons was no other than Goodman Niseron, La Péchina's grandfather, who was returning home after ringing the second *Angelus*, to work in his few rods of vineyard, the last bit of land belonging to him.

The old vine-dresser, bent double by toil, with white face and silvery hair, representing in his single person all the honesty there was in the commune, had been, during the Revolution, president of the Jacobin Club at Ville-aux-Fayes, and a juror at the revolutionary tribunal of the district. Jean-François Niseron, made of the same wood of which the apostles were made, presented at an earlier day the portrait, always the same under all pencils, of that Saint Peter to whom painters have always given the

square forehead of the common people, the abundant naturally curly hair of the worker, the muscles of the proletarian, the complexion of the fisherman, the forceful nose, the half-mocking mouth that laughs at misfortune, and the frame of the strong man who cuts wood in the neighboring forest to cook his dinner while the doctrinaires are discoursing.

Such at forty years of age, at the beginning of the Revolution, was this man, strong as iron, pure as gold. An advocate of the people's rights, he believed in a republic when he heard the rumbling of that name, even more formidable, perhaps, than the idea it represents. He believed in the republic of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the brotherhood of man, in the exchange of fine sentiments, in proclaiming merit, in election without intrigue, in everything, in short, which the restricted limits of an arrondissement, like Sparta, for instance, make possible, and which the vast proportions of an empire make chimerical. He signed his ideas with his blood, his only son started for the frontier; he did more, he signed them with his selfish interests, the supreme sacrifice of egoism. Being the nephew and only heir of the curé of Blangy, the all-powerful tribune of the fields might have despoiled the fair Arsène, the deceased priest's pretty maid-servant, of her heritage; he respected the wishes of the testator and accepted the poverty which came to him as speedily as his republic hastened to its fall.

Never had a sou or the branch of a tree belonging to another passed into the hands of that sublime

republican, who would make a republic acceptable if he could be at its head. He refused to purchase national property: he denied that the Republic possessed the right of confiscation. In reply to the questions of the Committee of Public Safety, he insisted that the virtue of its citizens would perform for the blessed fatherland the miracles which the intriguers in the government sought to perform by the power of gold. The patriot of antique mould publicly reproved the elder Gaubertin for his secret treachery, his complaisance to malefactors, and his depredations. He upbraided the virtuous Mouchon, the representative of the people whose virtue was incapacity pure and simple, as is the case with so many others, who, gorged with the most boundless political resources that a nation ever abandoned, armed with the might of a whole people, did not derive as much grandeur therefrom as Richelieu was able to find in the weakness of a king. Thus Citizen Niseron became a living reproach to too many people. The goodman was soon buried beneath the avalanche of oblivion with this horrible epitaph: "He is satisfied with nothing!" the remark of those who were bountifully fed during the sedition.

This other peasant of the Danube returned to his humble roof at Blangy, watched all his illusions vanish one by one, saw his republic come to an end in the train of an emperor, and fell into utter poverty under the eyes of Rigou, who found a way hypocritically to reduce him to that condition. Do you know why? Jean-François Niseron would never

accept anything from Rigou. Reiterated refusals left the holder of the succession in no doubt as to the profound dislike the curé's nephew entertained for him. Latterly, his frigid contempt had been crowned by the terrible threat on the subject of his granddaughter, of which Abbé Brossette had told the countess.

The old man had written a history of his own of the twelve years of the French Republic, devoted solely to the noble deeds that have made that heroic period immortal. The goodman determined to ignore the massacres, the spoliations, the infamies of all sorts; he still admired the instances of devotion, the *Avenger*, the gifts to the country, the rush of the people to the frontiers, and he continued his dream to lull himself to sleep therein.

The Revolution produced many poets like Père Niseron, who sang their poems by their firesides or in the armies, secretly or openly, by acts buried under the vapors of that tempest, just as, under the Empire, wounded men, forgotten, cried *Vive l'Empereur!* before dying. Such sublimity is peculiar to France. Abbé Brossette had respected the old man's inoffensive convictions. The latter had formed an artless attachment for the curé simply because he said: "The true republic is in the Gospel." And the old republican carried the Cross, he wore the red and black gown, he was dignified and serious at church, and he lived by the threefold functions with which Abbé Brossette had invested him, intending to give the good man, not perhaps

enough to live upon, but enough to keep him from dying of hunger.

The old man, the Aristides of Blangy, talked but little, like all noble-hearted dupes who wrap themselves in the cloak of resignation, but he never failed to reprove wrong-doing; wherefore the peasants feared him as the thief fears the police. He did not visit the *Grand-I-Vert* six times a year, although he was always warmly welcomed there. He cursed the grudging charity of the rich, their selfishness disgusted him, and by that fibre he always seemed connected with the peasants. "Père Niseron doesn't like the rich, he's one of us," they would say.

For its civic crown that estimable life obtained these words throughout the valley: "Good Père Niseron! there's no honester man!" Being chosen often as final referee in disputes of a certain kind, he realized to the full the magical expression: *the village ancient.*

He was always dressed with extreme neatness, although penniless; he wore short-clothes, coarse milled stockings, hobnailed shoes, the quasi-French coat with large buttons, retained by the old peasants, and the broad-brimmed felt hat; but on ordinary days he wore a blue cloth jacket so patched that it resembled tapestry. The pride of the man who feels that he is free and worthy of his freedom gave to his countenance and his bearing an indefinable suggestion of nobility; in a word, he wore clothes, not rags!

"Well, well! what extraordinary thing is happening here, old lady? I heard you at the church!" he said.

They told the old man about Vatel's attack, but they all talked together as country people do.

"If you didn't cut the tree, Vatel was wrong; but if you did cut it, you committed two wrongful acts," said Père Niseron.

"Have a glass of wine," said Tonsard, offering the goodman a glass full to the brim.

"Shall we go?" Vermichel asked the bailiff.

"Yes; we will do without Père Fourchon, and take the deputy mayor of Conches," replied Brunet. "Go on ahead, I have a document to deliver at the château; Père Rigou has won his second suit, and I have to serve notice of the judgment."

And Monsieur Brunet, enlivened by two glasses of eau-de-vie, remounted his gray mare after bidding Père Niseron good-morning, for everybody in the valley valued the old man's esteem.

No science, not even the science of statistics, can account for the more than telegraphic rapidity with which news travels in the country, nor for the facility with which it crosses the species of uncultivated steppes which, in France, are a standing accusation against government and capital. It is an authenticated fact in contemporary history that the most famous of bankers, after foundering his horses between Waterloo and Paris,—everybody knows why! he gained all that the Emperor lost, a kingdom,—was only a few hours in advance of the fatal

news. So it was that, an hour after the conflict between Mother Tonsard and Vatel, several other habitués of the *Grand-I-Vert* were assembled there.

The first arrival was Courtecuisse, in whom you would have found it hard to recognize the jovial keeper, the rubicund easy-circumstanced fellow, for whom his wife made *café au lait* in the morning, as we have seen earlier in this history. Haggard, thin, and aged, he offered to all eyes a terrible lesson that enlightened no one.

"He tried to go higher than the top of the ladder," was the reply made to those who expressed compassion for him and blamed Rigou; "he wanted to become a bourgeois!"

In fact, Courtecuisse, when he purchased the estate of the Bâchelerie, had intended to join the bourgeois ranks, and had boasted of it. His wife went about picking up manure! She and Courtecuisse rose before daybreak, dug in their richly-manured garden and procured several crops, without succeeding in paying anything more than the interest due Rigou on the balance of the purchase-money. Their daughter, who was in service at Auxerre, sent them her wages; but, despite their struggles, despite that assistance, they found themselves, when the debt matured, without a sou. Madame Courtecuisse, who used to indulge in a bottle of mulled wine and toast from time to time, drank nothing but water. Courtecuisse, as a general rule, dared not enter the *Grand-I-Vert*, for fear of leaving three sous there. Deprived of his power, he had lost his free tipples

at the wine-shop, and, like all fools, he shrieked ingratitude. As is the case with almost all peasants possessed by the demon of land-ownership, his means of support decreased as his troubles increased.

"Courtecuisse has built too many walls," said they who envied his position; "he ought to have waited till he owned the place before setting out fruit-trees."

The goodman had improved and fertilized the three acres of land sold to him by Rigou, the garden adjoining the house was beginning to be productive, and he feared that he should be turned out! He who once wore the shoes and gaiters of a huntsman went about dressed like Fourchon, with his feet in wooden clogs, and he accused the bourgeois of Aigues of having caused his poverty! That gnawing thought gave to the stout little man and to his face, formerly bright and smiling, a sombre, heavy air which made him resemble a sick man consumed by poison or by some chronic malady.

"What's the matter with you, Monsieur Courtecuisse? Have they cut your tongue out?" demanded Tonsard, finding that the goodman made no comment after he had described to him the battle that had taken place.

"That would be a pity," said La Tonsard; "he has no reason to complain of the nurse that cut the string; she did a good job."

"It freezes the *clapper* to think up a way of arranging things with Monsieur Rigou," replied the prematurely old young man, in a melancholy tone.

"Bah!" said the old woman, "you've got a pretty daughter seventeen years old; if she knows what's what, you can easily come to terms with that old scribbler."

"We sent her to Auxerre, to the old lady Mariotte, two years ago, to keep her out of harm's way," he replied; "I'd rather die than—"

"What a donkey!" said Tonsard; "look at my daughters, are they dead? The man who wouldn't say that they're as virtuous as images would have to talk to my gun."

"It would be hard to have to come to that!" cried Courtecuisse, shaking his head; "I'd rather somebody would pay me for firing at one of these *Arminacs!*"

"Oh! it's better to save one's father than to let one's virtue get mouldy!" retorted the host.

Suddenly Tonsard felt Père Niseron's hand on his shoulder.

"That isn't right, what you just said!" exclaimed the old man. "A father is the guardian of his family's honor. By acting as you do, you bring contempt on us, so that the people are accused of not being worthy of liberty! The common people ought to set the rich the example of civic virtue and honor. You sell yourself to Rigou for gold, the whole lot of you! Even if you don't give him your daughters, you give up your virtue to him! It's all wrong!"

"See where Courtebotte is!" said Tonsard.

"See where I am!" replied Père Niseron; "I sleep in peace, there are no thorns in my pillow."

"Let him have his say, Tonsard," said the wife, in her husband's ear, "you know well enough that *it's his hobby*, poor dear man."

Marie and Bonnébault, Catherine and her brother, arrived at that moment in a state of exasperation begun by Nicolas's ill-success and carried to its height by the disclosure of the project conceived by Michaud. So, as Nicolas entered his father's wine-shop, he gave vent to a horrible malediction against the Michaud household and Aigues.

"Here it is harvest-time; well, I won't go away till I've lighted my pipe at their mows!" he cried, with a violent blow on the table at which he took his seat.

"You mustn't chatter like that before people," said Godain, pointing to Père Niseron.

"If he says a word, I'll wring his neck like a chicken's," interposed Catherine; "he's had his time, the old gleaner of bad motives! They say he's virtuous; it's his disposition, that's all."

A curious and interesting spectacle was that presented by all those upturned faces, all those people assembled in that hovel, at whose door the old woman did sentry duty to assure the drinkers secrecy for their words.

Of all the faces, that of Godain, Catherine's suitor, was, perhaps, the most terrifying although the weakest. Godain, the penniless miser, the most cruel of all misers—for must not he who seeks money be put before him who hoards it? the latter looks within himself, the other looks ahead with

terrible fixity of expression;—Godain would have represented in your mind the most numerous type of peasant countenances.

This laboring man was of small stature, exempt from military service because he was below the requisite height, naturally thin and made thinner by work and by the stupid sobriety under which desperate workers like Courtecuisse succumb in the country; his face, no larger than your hand, obtained its light through a pair of yellow eyes speckled with green and brown spots, in which the thirst for worldly goods at any price was quenched by lust, but without heat; for desire, at first a boiling torrent, had cooled and hardened like lava. The skin clung to his temples, which were as brown as a mummy's. His scanty beard peered forth from his wrinkles like stubble in a ploughed field. Godain never perspired, he reabsorbed his substance. His hairy, hooked hands, nervous and untiring, looked as if they were made of old wood. Although he was barely twenty-seven years old, some white threads could already be seen in his rusty black hair. He wore a blouse, through the opening in which appeared a black shirt of stout cotton, which he probably wore for more than a month, and washed with his own hands in the Thune. His clogs were patched with old scraps of iron. The material of his trousers was unrecognizable under the numberless patches and piecings. Lastly, he wore on his head a shocking cap, evidently picked up in the doorway of some bourgeois house at Ville-aux-Fayes.

Being sufficiently clear-sighted to form a just estimate of the elements of fortune concealed in Catherine, he wished to succeed Tonsard at the *Grand-l-Vert;* he exerted all his cunning, therefore, all his powers, to capture her; he promised her wealth, he promised her the freedom her mother had enjoyed; lastly, he promised his father-in-law an enormous income, five hundred francs a year from his wine-shop, until it should be paid for, trusting to an interview he had had with Monsieur Brunet to pay in stamped paper. An edge-tool maker by trade, the imp worked at the wheelwright's as long as work was plenty; but he let himself out for dirty jobs at high wages. Although he possessed about eighteen hundred francs, invested with Gaubertin, of which no one in the valley knew, he lived like a pauper, slept in a loft at his employer's, and gleaned at harvest-time. He wore, sewn into the upper part of his Sunday breeches, Gaubertin's note, renewed every year and increased by the interest and by his savings.

"Bah! what do I care?" cried Nicolas, in answer to Godain's prudent remark. "If I've got to be a soldier, I'd rather the bran in the executioner's basket should drink my blood all at once than lose it drop by drop.—And I'll rid the country of one of these *Arminacs* the devil has let loose on us."

And he told of the alleged conspiracy formed by Michaud against him.

"Where do you expect France to get her soldiers?" said the white-haired old man, rising and

standing in front of Nicolas during the profound silence that greeted that horrible threat.

"We serve our time out and come back," said Bonnébault, twisting his moustache.

Seeing that he had fallen upon an assemblage of the worst scoundrels in the neighborhood, old Niseron shook his head and left the wine-shop, after giving Madame Tonsard a liard for his glass of wine. When the goodman's foot was on the steps outside, the general expression of satisfaction throughout the company would have told anyone who had been looking on, that they had all gotten rid of the living image of their consciences.

"Well, what do you say to all this, eh, Courtebotte?" asked Vaudoyer, who had entered suddenly, and to whom Tonsard had related the Vatel incident.

Courtecuisse, who was almost universally called by that *sobriquet*, smacked his tongue against the roof of his mouth as he placed his glass on the table.

"Vatel was at fault," he replied. "If I was in the old lady's place, I'd make a bruise on my side, take to my bed, and say I was sick, and then I'd summon the Upholsterer and his keeper on a claim for twenty crowns damages. Monsieur Sarcus would allow it—"

At all events, the Upholsterer would give it to avoid the row this may make," said Godain.

Vaudoyer, the ex-municipal keeper, a man of five feet six, with a face marked by small-pox, and hollowed out like a nut-cracker, assumed a doubtful expression, and held his peace.

"Well," said Tonsard, licking his lips at the prospect of sixty francs, "what's the matter with you, you great booby? They've smashed up my mother twenty crowns' worth, and we'll make the most of it! We'll make three hundred francs' worth of noise, and Monsieur Gourdon can go and tell 'em at Aigues that mother's hip's dislocated."

"And he can dislocate it for her!" interposed his wife; "they do it in Paris."

"That would cost too much," said Godain.

"I've heard too much about the king's servants to believe that things would go to suit you," said Vaudoyer, at last: he had often assisted the law officers and Soudry the ex-brigadier. "So long as it's at Soulanges it would go all right; Monsieur Soudry represents the government and he don't wish the Upholsterer any good; but the Upholsterer and Vatel, if you attack 'em, will be just malicious enough to defend themselves, and they'll say: 'The woman was in fault, she had a tree; if she hadn't, she'd have let her bundle be opened on the road, she wouldn't have run away; if any accident happened to her, she has nothing but her theft to blame for it.' No, it isn't a sure case."

"Did the bourgeois defend himself when I sued him?" said Courtecuisse. "He paid me."

"If you want, I'll go to Soulanges," said Bonnébault; "I'll consult Monsieur Gourdon, the clerk, and you shall know to-night if there's anything in it."

"You don't want anything but excuses to hang

round that fat hen-turkey, old Socquard's daughter," said Marie Tonsard, giving him a slap on the back that made his lungs ring.

At that moment, they heard outside the house this passage from an old Burgundian Christmas ditty:

> "Ein bel androi de sai vie
> Ca quai toule, ein jour,
> Ai changé l'ea de brechie
> Au vin de Mador." *

Everyone recognized the voice of Père Fourchon, who was evidently highly delighted with the passage, and whom Mouche accompanied in falsetto.

"Ah! they're well groomed!" the old woman cried to her daughter-in-law, "your father's as red as a gridiron, and the little one smells like a grapevine."

"Hail!" cried the old man; "you're a fine lot o' rascals here!—Hail!" he said to his granddaughter, whom he surprised in the act of kissing Bonnébault; "hail, Marie, full of vices! may Satan be with you, be accursed among all women, etc.—Hail, one and all! You are caught! you can say adieu to your sheaves! There's news for you. I told you the bourgeois would checkmate you; he's going to

> * "Un bel endroit de sa vie
> Fut qu'a table un jour,
> Il changea l'eau du pot
> En vin de Madere."
>
> ---
>
> "'Twas a great day in his life
> When, as he sat at table,
> He changed the water in the jug
> Into good Madeira."

scourge you with the law!—Ah! that's what it is to contend against the bourgeois! the bourgeois have made so many laws that they have one for every trick—"

At that point a tremendous hiccough suddenly turned the venerable orator's ideas in another direction.

"If Vermichel was here, I'd give him a crack in the jaw; he should have an idea of what Alicante wine is like! What wine! If I wasn't a Burgundian, I'd be a Spaniard! Wine fit for God himself! I believe it's what the Pope says mass with! Blessed wine! I'm young!—Look ye, Courtebotte, if your wife was here—I'd think she was young! Spanish wine beats mulled wine, that's sure!—We must make a revolution, just to empty the cellars."

"But what's your news, papa?" asked Tonsard.

"There won't be any harvest for you people: the Upholsterer's going to forbid your gleaning."

"Forbid gleaning!" cried the whole wine-shop in a single voice, dominated by the shrill tones of the four women.

"Yes," said Mouche, "he's going to take out an order, have it made public by Groison and posted all through the canton, and nobody without a pauper's certificate can glean."

"And note this!" said Fourchon, "the loafers from other communes won't be allowed here."

"What's that? what's that?" said Bonnébault. "My grandmother and I and your mother, Godain, can't glean here? There's official nonsense for you!

I'll make fools of them! I say, has this mayor-general been let loose from hell?"

"Will you glean all the same, Godain?" said Tonsard to the blacksmith's journeyman, who was talking aside to Catherine.

"I, oh! I haven't anything, I'm a pauper," he replied; "I shall apply for a certificate."

"Say, what did they give my father for his otter, my dear?" the fair hostess asked Mouche.

Although succumbing to the pangs of an over-worked digestive apparatus, and with an eye rendered uncertain by two bottles of wine, Mouche, who was sitting on Tonsard's knee, put his head upon his aunt's neck, and whispered slyly in her ear:

"I don't know, but he's got some gold! If you'll feed me well for a month, perhaps I'll find his hiding-place; he's got one."

"Father has got some gold!" La Tonsard whispered to her husband, whose voice rose above the uproar occasioned by the lively discussion in which all the revellers participated.

"Hush! there goes Groison!" exclaimed the old woman.

Profound silence at once reigned in the wine-shop. When Groison was out of ear-shot, the old woman made a sign and the discussion was renewed on the question whether they should glean as heretofore without paupers' certificates.

"You'll have to obey," said Père Fourchon; "for the Upholsterer's gone to see the prefect and ask him for troops to keep order. They'll shoot you like

the dogs—that we are!" cried the old man, trying to overcome the numbness of the tongue produced by the Spanish wine.

This last announcement by Fourchon, absurd though it was, made all the drinkers thoughtful; they believed that the government was capable of massacring them without pity.

"They had trouble like this in the outskirts of Toulouse, where I was in garrison," said Bonnébault; "we turned out, the peasants were cut down, arrested. It was laughable to see them resisting the troops. There were ten of 'em sent to the galleys by the court and eleven to prison; it was all knocked in the head, I tell you! A soldier's a soldier, you're *pékins*,* they have a right to draw their sabres on you, and there you are!"

"Well, well," said Tonsard, "what the devil's the matter with you fellows, that you're scared like little kids? Can they take anything from my mother or my daughters?—There's the prison, you say?—Very good, they'll eat 'em out of house and home; the Upholsterer won't put the whole province in prison. Besides, the prisoners will be better fed in the king's house than at home, and they'll be kept warm in winter."

"You're a pack of simpletons!" bellowed Père Fourchon. "It's better to live on the bourgeois than attack him face to face, I tell you! Any other way, you'll break your back. If you like the galleys, that's different. You don't have to work so hard as

* Civilians:—military slang.

you do in the fields, it's true, but you haven't your liberty."

"Perhaps," suggested Vaudoyer, who showed himself one of the bravest when it was a matter of giving advice, "it would be better for some of us to risk our skins to deliver the country from that beast of a Gévaudan who's gone to earth at the gate of Avonne."

"To do Michaud's business for him?" said Nicolas. "I'm in that."

"Times ain't ripe for that," said Fourchon, "we should lose too much by it, my children. We must whine and cry starvation; the bourgeois of Aigues and his wife will try to help us, and you'll get more out of it than out of the gleaning."

"Bah! you mole-catchers!" cried Tonsard. "Suppose we do have a row with the law and the troops, they won't put irons on a whole province, and we shall find people well disposed to help us at Ville-aux-Fayes and in the old nobles."

"That's true," said Courtecuisse; "the Upholsterer's the only one who complains; Messieurs de Soulanges and Ronquerolles and others are satisfied! When you think that, if that cuirassier had had the courage to get himself killed as others did, I should still be happy at my Avonne gate, which he's turned all upside down so that you wouldn't know it!"

"They won't call out the troops for a mean cur of a bourgeois who's on ill terms with a whole province!" said Godain. "It's his own fault! he wants

to mix everything up here and turn everybody inside out; the government'll tell him to go to the devil."

"The government don't say anything else, it's driven to it, poor government," said Fourchon, seized with a sudden compassion for the ruling powers; "I pity the dear government. It's in bad luck, it hasn't a sou, like us,—and that's a stupid thing for a government that coins money itself.—Ah! if I was government!"

"Why, they tell me at Ville-aux-Fayes," cried Courtecuisse, "that Monsieur de Ronquerolles spoke about our rights in the Assembly."

"It's in M'sieu Rigou's paper," said Vaudoyer, who, as ex-municipal keeper, knew how to read and write; "I read it."

Despite his maudlin tenderness, old Fourchon, like many people whose faculties are stimulated by intoxication, followed with an intelligent eye and alert ear the foregoing discussion, which was made doubly interesting by numerous asides. Suddenly he rose and took up a position in the middle of the wine-shop.

"Listen to the old man, he's drunk!" said Tonsard; "he has a double supply of mischief, his own and that of the wine—"

"Of Spain!—that makes three," Fourchon interrupted, laughing the laugh of a satyr. "My children, you mustn't go at the thing in front; you're too weak, take it sideways!—Pretend to be dead, sleeping dogs. The little woman's well frightened already, I tell you! She'll soon have enough of it;

she'll leave the country, and if she leaves, the Upholsterer will follow her, for she's his passion. There's your plan. But, to hasten their going, my advice is to take away their adviser, their strength, our spy, our monkey."

"Who's that?"

"Why, that damned curé!" said Tonsard; "a hunter of sins, who wants to feed us on holy wafers."

"That's the truth!" cried Vaudoyer; "we were happy without the curé. We must get rid of that sanctimonious devil, there's the real enemy."

"The Gringalet," continued Fourchon, calling Abbé Brossette by the *sobriquet* which he owed to his shabby appearance, "might get taken in, perhaps, by some sly girl, as he always keeps Lent. And by advertising him with a great hullabaloo if he was caught *on a lark*, his bishop would be obliged to send him somewhere else. That's something that would please good Père Rigou devilish well. If Courtecuisse's daughter was willing to leave her mistress at Auxerre, she's so pretty that she could save the country by playing piety. And a *ran tan plan!*"

"Why shouldn't you do it?" said Godain, in an undertone, to Catherine; "there'd be a basketful of crowns to pick up to avoid the scandal, and you could be mistress here right off."

"Shall we glean? shall we not glean?" said Bonnébault. "I care mighty little about your curé, for my part! I belong at Conches, and we haven't got any curé to stir up our consciences with his bell."

"Look you," observed Vaudoyer, "we must go and find out from Goodman Rigou, who knows the law, whether the Upholsterer can forbid us gleaning, and he'll tell us if we're right. If the Upholsterer's within his rights, then we'll see about taking things sideways, as the old man says."

"There'll be blood spilt!" said Nicolas, frowning darkly as he rose after drinking a whole bottle of wine which Catherine had poured out for him to keep him from talking. "If you listen to me, you'll bring down Michaud! But you're a lot of weak fools!"

"Not I!" said Bonnébault. "If you're the kind of friends that'll keep your mouths shut, I'll undertake to have a shot at the Upholsterer myself!—What sport to land a bullet in his bread-basket! that would revenge me on all my skunks of officers!"

"La, la!" cried Jean-Louis Tonsard, who was popularly supposed to be Gaubertin's son, and who had entered the room in Fourchon's wake.

This youth, who for several months had been paying court to Rigou's pretty maid-servant, succeeded his father in the profession of trimmer of hedges and shrubbery and in other *tonsardes* occupations. Going about to the houses of the bourgeois, he talked with masters and servants alike and collected ideas which made of him the man of parts, the shrewd one of the family. We shall see in a moment that, in paying his addresses to Rigou's servant, Jean-Louis justified the prevailing high opinion of his shrewdness.

"Well, what is it now, prophet?" said the wine-shop-keeper to his son.

"I say that you're playing the bourgeois' game," replied Jean-Louis. "To frighten the people at Aigues in order to maintain your privileges, that's all right! but to drive them out of the country and make them sell Aigues, as the bourgeois in the valley want to do, is contrary to our interests. If you help to cut up the great estates, where in the devil will you go to get property to sell at the next revolution?—Then you'll get estates for nothing, as Rigou got his; while, if you put them between the jaws of the bourgeois, the bourgeois will spit them out at you reduced in size and increased in price; you'll be working for them like all the people that work for Rigou. Look at Courtecuisse!"

This allocution expounded too deep a policy to be grasped by drunken men, all of whom, except Courtecuisse, were hoarding money in order to get their share when the cake of Aigues was cut. So they let Jean-Louis talk and continued their private conversations, as they do in the Chamber of Deputies.

"Very well, go on, you'll be Rigou's machines!" cried Fourchon, who alone had understood his grandson.

At that moment, Langlumé, the miller at Aigues, passed the door. La belle Tonsard hailed him.

"Is it true, Monsieur Deputy," she said, "that gleaning will be forbidden?"

Langlumé, a jovial little man, with a face white with flour, and dressed in dusty white cloth, mounted the steps, and the peasants at once resumed their serious mien.

"*Dame!* my children, yes and no! The needy will glean; but the measures to be taken will be very profitable to you."

"How so?" said Godain.

"Why, if all the unfortunate are prevented from living here," the miller replied, winking in the Norman fashion, "you people won't be prevented from going elsewhere, unless all the mayors do like the mayor of Blangy."

"Then, it's true?" said Tonsard, with a threatening air.

"I'm going back to Conches," said Bonnébault, putting his foraging-cap over his ear and switching the air with his hazel stick, "to tell my friends."

And the Lovelace of the valley took his departure, whistling the air of this military ballad:

> "Toi qui connais les hussards de la garde,
> Connais-tu pas l'trombon' du régiment?" *

"I say, Marie, your sweetheart's taking a funny road to go to Conches!" cried the old woman to her granddaughter.

"He's going to see Aglaé!" said Marie, rushing to the door. "I shall have to give her a good thrashing once for all, the beast!"

"Go and see Père Rigou, Vaudoyer," said Tonsard to the ex-keeper; "then we shall know what to do. He's our oracle and his saliva won't cost anything."

> *"Say, you who know the hussars of the guard,
> Don't you know the trombone of the regiment?"

"Another foolish move!" exclaimed Jean-Louis, in an undertone. "He sells everything; as Annette says, he's more dangerous to listen to than a storm of anger."

"I advise you to be prudent," Langlumé added, "for the general has started for the prefecture on account of your misdeeds, and Sibilet said that he'd sworn on his honor to go as far as Paris to appeal to the Chancellor of France and the king, to the whole shop, if necessary, to have justice on his peasants."

"*His* peasants!" someone exclaimed.

"Oho! so we don't belong to ourselves any more?"

At that question from Tonsard, Vaudoyer left to go and see the ex-mayor.

Langlumé, who had already gone, turned on the steps and replied:

"You pack of do-nothings, have you money in the Funds that you set up to be your own masters?"

Although spoken laughingly, those profound words were understood in about the same way that a horse understands a cut with a whip.

"*Ran tan plan!* you masters!—Look you, my boy, after your performance this morning, it's not my clarinet that you'll ever put between your four fingers and thumb," said Fourchon to Nicolas.

"Don't tease him, he's quite capable of making you throw up your wine by rubbing your belly!" was Catherine's brutal retort to her grandfather.

XIII

THE COUNTRY MONEY-LENDER

Strategically considered, Rigou was at Blangy what an outpost is in war: he kept watch on Aigues and did it well! The police will never have spies comparable to those who place themselves at the service of hatred.

On the general's arrival at Aigues, Rigou undoubtedly formed some scheme which Montcornet's marriage to a Troisville defeated, for he seemed inclined to take the great landowner under his protection. His intentions were so clear, that Gaubertin deemed it necessary to enlighten him as to the conspiracy against Aigues and to give him a share therein. Before accepting that share and a rôle in the conspiracy, Rigou determined to put the general at the foot of the wall, as he expressed it.

When the countess was installed, a little wicker *carriole*, painted green, drove into the state courtyard at Aigues one day. Monsieur le maire, supported by his mayoress, alighted and went up the steps from the garden. Rigou spied the countess at a window. Being entirely in the interest of the bishop, the religion, and Abbé Brossette, who had

made haste to warn her against his enemy, the countess sent word by François that *madame was out*.

That impertinence, worthy of a woman born in Russia, made the ex-Benedictine's face turn yellow. If the countess had had any curiosity to see the man of whom the curé said: "He is one of the damned who plunges into wickedness as into a bath, to cool himself," perhaps she would have refrained from setting up as a barrier between the mayor and the château the cold-blooded, deliberate hatred which the liberals bore the royalists, augmented by the irritating accompaniments of neighborhood in the country, where the memory of a wound to the self-esteem is constantly revived.

A few details as to this man and his morals will have the merit, while throwing light upon his participation in the plot called *the great affair* by his two associates, of depicting an exceedingly interesting type, that of country existences peculiar to France, which no pencil has yet sought to represent. Indeed, nothing about this man is without interest, neither his house nor his way of blowing the fire, nor his manner of eating; his morals, his opinions, all will help greatly in telling the story of that valley. Lastly, the renegade explains the utility of democracy, he is at once its theory and its practice, its alpha and omega, its *summum*.

You remember, perhaps, certain past-masters in miserliness described in previous Scenes. First of all, the provincial miser, Père Grandet, of Saumur, miserly as the tiger is cruel; then Gobseck the

bill-discounter, the Jesuit of gold, enjoying only the power it gives and tasting the tears of misfortune to see of what vintage they are; then the Baron de Nucingen, raising financial frauds to the level of politics. Lastly, you remember, doubtless, that portrait of domestic parsimony, old Hochon of Issoudun, and that other miser through *esprit de famille*, little La Baudraye of Sancerre? Well, human sentiments, avarice above all, have such varying shades on the various floors of our social structure, that there is still another miser on the stage of this amphitheatre of studies in manners. Rigou remains! Rigou, the selfish miser, that is to say, full of consideration for his own pleasures, harsh and cold to others; in a word, the ecclesiastical miser, the monk who remained a monk to squeeze out the juice of the lemon called well-being, and who became a layman to snatch at the money of the public. Let us first explain the constant enjoyment that he experienced in sleeping under his own roof.

Blangy, that is to say the sixty houses described by Blondet in his letter to Nathan, lies on a slight elevation, on the left of the Thune. As every house has a garden, the aspect of the village is delightful. Some of the houses lie along the stream. At the summit of the hill is the church, which formerly had its parsonage beside it; the cemetery, as in many villages, surrounds the apse of the church.

The sacrilegious Rigou had not failed to purchase the parsonage, built long before by the good Catholic, Mademoiselle Choin, upon land purchased by her

for the purpose. A terraced garden, from which the eye looked down upon the territory of Blangy, Soulanges, and Cerneux, which lay between the two seignorial parks, separated the former parsonage from the church. On the opposite side lay a meadow, purchased by the last curé shortly before his death, and surrounded with walls by the suspicious Rigou.

The mayor having refused to restore the vicarage to its original use, the commune was obliged to purchase a peasant's house near the church; it was found necessary to expend five thousand francs in enlarging it, restoring it, and adding a little garden, separated from the sacristy only by its wall, so that communication was established as formerly between the vicarage and the church.

These two houses, built on a line with the church, with which they seemed to be connected by their gardens, looked upon a tract of land covered with trees, which formed the public square of Blangy, the enclosure being completed by a building erected by the count opposite the new rectory, intended to contain the mayor's office, sleeping apartments for the municipal keeper, and the school of Brothers of the Christian Doctrine, heretofore vainly solicited by Abbé Brossette. Thus not only did the houses of the ex-Benedictine and the young curé adjoin the church, being separated as well as connected by it, but they overlooked each other. The whole village, moreover, spied upon Abbé Brossette's actions. The Grande Rue, which began at the Thune, ascended in a winding course to the church. Peasants'

vineyards and gardens and a small tract of woodland crowned the hill of Blangy.

Rigou's house, the finest in the village, was built of large stones, of a kind peculiar to Bourgogne, set in yellow mortar laid on the full width of the trowel, producing waving yellow stripes pierced here and there by the faces, generally black, of the stone.

A broad stripe of mortar, unmarred by a single stone, formed a frame at each window, marked by the passing years with fine irregular fissures, such as we see in old ceilings. The roughly-made shutters attracted attention by the bright dragon-color of their paint. Patches of flat moss cemented the slates of the roof. It was the type of Burgundian houses; travellers see similar ones by thousands as they pass through that part of France.

A low door opened into a hall with the cage of a wooden staircase in the centre. Near the entrance was the door of a large room with three windows looking on the square. The kitchen, which was under the staircase, obtained its light from a carefully paved courtyard entered through a *porte cochère*. Such was the arrangement of the ground-floor.

The first floor contained three rooms and there was an attic room above.

A wood-pile, a carriage-house, and a stable adjoined the kitchen and formed two sides of a square. Above those unsubstantial structures were hay and grain lofts, a store-room for fruit, and a servant's chamber.

A barnyard, a cow-shed, and pig-pens faced the house.

The garden, about an acre in extent, and enclosed by a wall, was a genuine curé's garden, that is to say, filled with espaliers and standard fruit-trees, with vine-arbors, gravel-paths bordered by clipped box, and beds of vegetables, fertilized by the manure from the stable.

Beyond the house was a second enclosure, set out with trees and surrounded with hedges, of sufficient extent to afford pasturage for two cows all the year round.

The large room on the first floor had a wooden wainscoting waist high and was hung with old tapestry. The walnut furniture, black with age and upholstered in hand-worked tapestry, harmonized well with the wainscoting and with the ceiling, which was also of wood. In the latter, there were three protruding timbers, painted, and the spaces between were plastered. The mantelpiece, of black walnut, surmounted by a mirror in a grotesque frame, held no other ornament than two copper eggs mounted on a marble pedestal, and so made as to open in the middle; the upper part when turned back made a candlestick.

Such double-ended candlesticks, embellished with small chains, an invention of the reign of Louis XV., were beginning to be rare. On the wall opposite the windows, resting on a green and gold bracket, was a clock of a common but excellent sort.

Curtains dating back fifty years shrieked upon their iron rods; the material of which they were made, not unlike the covering of mattresses, was a

sort of cotton, pink and white in alternate squares, which came from the Indies. A sideboard and dining-table completed the furniture of this apartment, everything being kept exceedingly neat and clean.

In the chimney-corner stood an immense *bergère*, or easy-chair, Rigou's own special seat. In the corner of the room, above the little secretary which he used as a desk, could be seen, hanging on an extremely vulgar brass hook, a pair of bellows, the origin of Rigou's fortune.

From this succinct description, in a style rivalling that of advertisements of sale, it is a simple matter to divine that the respective apartments of Monsieur and Madame Rigou contained nothing that was not absolutely necessary; but you would err in thinking that this parsimony could exclude material comfort. For instance, the most exacting fine lady would have found herself admirably well provided for in Rigou's bed, composed of excellent mattresses, of fine linen sheets, and fattened by a feather-bed purchased long ago for some abbé by a devout female member of his flock, the whole protected from the north wind by good curtains. So it was with everything, as we shall see.

At the outset, the miser had reduced his wife, who could not read or write or figure, to absolute obedience. After ruling the deceased curé, the poor creature ended by becoming her husband's slave, doing the cooking and washing, and assisted almost none at all by a very pretty girl of nineteen, named

Annette, who was as submissive to Rigou as her mistress, and who received thirty francs a year.

Tall, thin, and withered, with a yellow face tinged with red on the cheek-bones, her head always wrapped in a silk handkerchief, Madame Rigou, who wore the same petticoat from year's end to year's end, did not leave her house two hours a month and expended her activity upon all the duties that a faithful servant performs. The most skilful observer could have found no trace of the superb figure, the fresh coloring à la Rubens, the graceful plumpness, the beautiful teeth, the virgin's eyes, which formerly attracted the curé Niseron's attention to her as a girl. The birth of her only child, Madame Soudry the younger, had decimated her teeth, made her eyelashes drop out, dimmed her eyes, withered her complexion. It seemed that God's finger had fallen heavily on the wife of the priest. Like all well-to-do country housekeepers, she liked to see her wardrobes filled with silk dresses, in the piece, or made up and unworn; laces, jewels which served no purpose except to cause others to commit the sin of envy and to make Rigou's young servants long for her death. She was one of those creatures, half woman, half animal, born to live instinctively. This ex-lovely Arsène being entirely free from selfishness, the legacy of the late curé Niseron would be inexplicable except for the curious occurrence which gave rise to it, and which we must narrate for the benefit of the immense tribe of heirs.

Madame Niseron, the old sacristan's wife, overwhelmed her husband's uncle with attentions; for the impending succession to an old man of seventy-two, estimated to be worth between forty and fifty thousand francs, would place the family of his only heir in comfortable circumstances, whose coming was impatiently awaited by the late Madame Niseron, who, in addition to her son, was blessed with a fascinating, playful, innocent little girl, one of those creatures who are made so perfect, perhaps, only because they are soon to disappear, for she died at fourteen of *green sickness*, the popular name for chlorosis. The will-o'-the-wisp of the vicarage, the child was as much at home at her granduncle's, the curé, as in her father's house, she was mistress there, she was fond of Mademoiselle Arsène, the pretty maid-servant whom her uncle was able to hire in 1789 by reason of the license in matters of discipline caused by the first tempests of the Revolution. Arsène, who was the niece of the curé's old housekeeper, was taken on to assist her; for, feeling that she had not long to live, old Mademoiselle Pichard wished, no doubt, to transmit her privileges to the fair Arsène.

In 1791, at the time when the curé Niseron offered shelter to Dom Rigou and Frère Jean, the little Niseron girl indulged in a very innocent frolic. As she was playing with some other children and with Arsène at the game which consists in each person in turn hiding an object which the others try to find, the one who has hidden it, crying: "You are burning!" or: "You are freezing!" according as the seekers

approach the object or move away from it—little Geneviève conceived the idea of hiding the living-room bellows in Arsène's bed. The bellows could not be found; the game came to an end. Geneviève was taken home by her mother and forgot to restore the bellows to its nail. Arsène and her aunt looked for the bellows for a week, then ceased their search, for they could do without it; the old curé blew his fire with a bean-blower, made in the days when bean-blowers were fashionable, a transmittendum probably from one of the courtiers of Henri III. At last, one evening, a month before her death, the housekeeper, after a dinner at which Abbé Mouchon, the Niseron family, and the curé of Soulanges were guests, renewed the lamentations of Jeremiah on the subject of the bellows, being utterly unable to explain its disappearance.

"Why, the bellows has been in Arsène's bed two weeks," said little Geneviève, bursting with laughter; "if the great lazy thing ever made her bed, she'd have found it."

In 1791 everybody could laugh; but the laugh was succeeded by the most profound silence.

"There's nothing in that to laugh at," said the housekeeper; "since I've been sick, Arsène has sat up with me."

Despite that explanation, Curé Niseron bestowed upon Madame Niseron and her husband the withering gaze of a priest who believes that a conspiracy has been formed against him. The housekeeper died, Dom Rigou succeeded so well in turning the

curé's antipathy to his own advantage, that François Niseron was disinherited in favor of Arsène Pichard.

In 1823, Rigou, moved thereto by gratitude, still used the bean-blower to kindle the fire, and left the bellows on its nail.

Madame Niseron, who loved her daughter madly, did not survive her; mother and child died in 1794. After the curé's death, Rigou himself attended to Arsène's affairs, having taken her to wife.

The former lay-brother of the abbey, attached to Rigou like a dog to his master, became the groom, the gardener, the cow-herd, the valet, and the steward of that sensual Harpagon.

Arsène Rigou, married in 1821 to the king's attorney, without dowry, reminded one a little of her mother's commonplace beauty, and possessed her father's crafty intellect.

Rigou, at this time sixty-seven years of age, had not had a day's illness in thirty years, and nothing seemed likely to interfere with his genuinely insolent health. Tall and thin, his eyes bordered by dark circles, the lids almost black, when he exhibited his wrinkled, rough, red neck in the morning, you would readily have compared him to a condor, especially as his nose, which was very long and pinched at the end, emphasized the resemblance by its sanguinary coloring. His head, almost bald, would have terrified experts in heads by the sharp ridge on top, a sure indication of a despotic will. His grayish eyes, almost hidden by the lids with their string-like membranes, were preordained to hypocritical

feigning. Two locks of hair of uncertain color, so thin that they did not hide the skin, floated in the air above a pair of ears, broad and long, and without the seam on the edge, a peculiarity which indicates cruelty, but in the moral order only, when it does not denote insanity. The mouth, very long, and thin-lipped, indicated a voracious eater, a determined drinker, in the downward curve at the corners, forming two comma-shaped folds, down which the gravy trickled, and where the saliva sparkled when he was eating or talking. Heliogabalus must have been like him.

His costume, which never varied, consisted of a long blue redingote with a military collar, a black cravat, trousers, and a full waistcoat of black broadcloth. His stout-soled shoes were embellished with nails on the outside, and on the inside, with inner soles knitted by his wife during the winter evenings. Annette and her mistress knitted monsieur's stockings also.

Rigou's name was Grégoire. His friends were never tired of the various puns made possible by the G. of the baptismal name, despite the immoderate use they had made of them for thirty years. He was always saluted by some such remark as: "*J'ai Rigou!—Je Ris, goutte!—Ris, goûte!—Rigoulard,*" etc., but especially by the name of *Grigou*—G. Rigou.

Although this sketch describes his character, no one could imagine the lengths to which the ex-Benedictine, in solitude and without opposition, had

carried the science of selfishness, of living well, and of sensual pleasure in all its forms. In the first place, he ate alone, served by his wife and Annette, who ate in the kitchen with Jean after he had finished and while he was digesting his dinner, and comforting himself with his wine as he read the *news*.

In the country no one knows the distinctive names of the different journals; they are all called *the news*.

The dinner, as well as the breakfast and supper, was always composed of exquisite dishes and cooked with the science that distinguishes the housekeepers of curés among all cooks. Madame Rigou made butter herself twice a week. Cream was a component part of all her sauces. The vegetables were so freshly cut that they leaped from their beds into the saucepan. Parisians, who are accustomed to eat green stuff, vegetables that have sprouted a second time through being exposed to the sunlight, to the odors of the streets, to fermentation in shops, and watered by the hucksters, who give them thus a most deceitful appearance of freshness, know nothing of the exquisite flavor of those products upon which nature has bestowed ephemeral but potent virtues when they are eaten alive, so to speak.

The butcher at Soulanges brought his best meat to the redoubtable Rigou, through fear of losing his custom. The chickens, being raised at the house, were exceedingly delicate.

This hypocritical nicety was noticeable in everything intended for Rigou. If the learned Thelemist's slippers were of coarse leather, they were lined with

fine lamb's wool. If he wore a redingote of coarse cloth, it did not touch his skin, for his shirt, washed and ironed in the house, had been woven by the most skilful fingers of Friesland. His wife, Annette, and Jean drank the wine of the country, the wine that Rigou reserved out of his own vintage; but in his private cellar, as well stocked as a cellar in Belgium, the finest of Burgundy wines touched elbows with those of Bordeaux, Champagne, Roussillon, the Rhône, and Spain, all bought ten years before they were used, and all bottled by Brother Jean. The Curaçoa came from Madame Amphoux; the money-lender had laid in a stock sufficient for the rest of his days in the distribution of the spoils of a château in Bourgogne.

Rigou ate and drank like Louis XIV., one of the greatest gluttons ever known, a fact which betrays the great outlay of a more than voluptuous life. Discreet and adroit in his secret prodigality, he haggled over the most trivial transactions as only ecclesiastics can haggle. Instead of taking infinite precautions to avoid being deceived in his purchases, the crafty monk kept a specimen and had the specifications reduced to writing; but when his wine or his supplies were on the way, he notified the shippers that if there proved to be the slightest defect in the goods, he would refuse to accept delivery.

Jean, the manager of the fruit department, was trained to preserve the products of the finest orchard in Bourgogne. Rigou ate pears, apples, and sometimes grapes, at Easter.

Never was prophet, who was likely to become a god, more blindly obeyed than Rigou was in his own house, in his slightest whims. The contraction of his heavy, black eyebrows caused his wife, Annette, and Jean mortal anxiety; he held his three slaves by the minute multiplicity of their duties, which was like a chain about their necks. At every moment in the day, the poor creatures were confronted by some compulsory task to be performed under the master's eye; but they came at last to take a sort of pleasure in performing these never-ending labors; they were never weary. All three had that master's well-being for the sole and only text of their thoughts.

Annette was the tenth pretty maid taken into his service since 1795 by Rigou, who flattered himself that he would make the journey to the grave by these relays of young girls. She had come to him at sixteen and was to be discharged at nineteen. Each of the girls—selected with the most pains-taking care at Auxerre or Clamecy or in the Morvan—was allured by the promise of a fine future; but Madame Rigou obstinately persisted in living! And it invariably happened at the end of three years that a quarrel caused by the servant's insolence to her poor mistress necessitated her dismissal.

Annette, a veritable masterpiece of shrewd, ingenious, piquant beauty, deserved a duchess's coronet. She did not lack wit; Rigou knew nothing of the understanding between Jean-Louis Tonsard and her, which proved that he allowed himself to be

hoodwinked by the pretty creature, the only one to whom ambition had suggested flattery as a means of blinding the lynx.

This Louis XV. without a throne did not confine his attentions to Annette only. Holding burdensome mortgages upon the estates purchased by peasants at a price beyond their means, he took for his harem the whole valley, from Soulanges to five leagues beyond Conches toward Brie, without other expense than *postponements of foreclosure* to obtain those ephemeral treasures which devour the fortunes of so many old men.

Thus that delightful life, a life that might almost be compared to that led by Bouret, cost him almost nothing. Thanks to his white negroes, Rigou had his wood felled and cut and hauled, and his hay and grain mowed and harvested. For the peasant, a day's work with his hands is a small matter, especially in consideration of delay in the payment of interest. Rigou, while asking only a small premium for a few months' delay, squeezed his debtors by calling upon them for manual service, veritable statute-labor, which they furnished thinking that they were giving nothing because they took nothing out of their pockets. In this way they sometimes paid Rigou more than the principal of their debt.

Deep as a monk, silent as a Benedictine engaged upon an historical work, cunning as a priest, deceitful like every miser, but always keeping within the law, the old fellow would have been Tiberius at Rome, Richelieu under Louis XIII., Fouché, if he had had

sufficient ambition to be a member of the Convention; but he was shrewd enough to be a Lucullus without display, a miserly voluptuary. To occupy his mind he had at hand a vigorous hatred with all its accessories. He was a thorn in the side of General Comte de Montcornet. He moved the peasants by pulling concealed strings, which he enjoyed handling, like a game of chess in which the pawns were living beings, the knights rode about on horseback, fools like Fourchon chattered, feudal castles gleamed in the sun, and the queen mischievously checkmated the king. Every morning when he rose, he could see from his window the haughty peaks of the château of Aigues, the chimneys of the gate-houses, and the noble gateways, and he would say to himself: "All that will fall! I will dry up those streams, I will fell those trees!" He had his eye upon a small victim as well as a great one. While he plotted the ruin of the château, the renegade gloated over the idea of killing Abbé Brossette by pin-thrusts.

To finish the picture of this ex-monk, it will suffice to say that he went to mass, regretting that his wife was alive, and manifested a desire to be reconciled with the Church as soon as he should be a widower. He bowed deferentially to Abbé Brossette when he met him, and spoke softly to him, never losing his temper. As a general rule, all those people who are or have been connected with the Church have the patience of an ant; they owe it to the obligation of maintaining a decorous behavior, a branch of education which the vast majority of Frenchmen, even of

those who consider themselves the best educated, have sadly neglected for the past twenty years. All the inmates of convents who were expelled therefrom by the Revolution and who went into business showed by their coolness and their reserve the superiority that ecclesiastical discipline gives to all the children of the Church, even to those who desert her.

Having had his eyes opened in 1792, by the affair of the will, Gaubertin had been able to probe the cunning concealed beneath the malevolent features of that clever hypocrite; so he had made an ally of him, worshipping with him before the Golden Calf. At the time of the foundation of the house of Leclercq, he told Rigou to invest fifty thousand francs in it and guaranteed the investment. Rigou became a silent partner, whose importance in the concern increased as he allowed his investment to be increased by the interest as it accrued. At the time of which we write, Rigou's interest in the house still amounted to a hundred thousand francs, although in 1816 he had withdrawn about a hundred and eighty thousand to invest in the public funds from which he received an income of seventeen thousand. Lupin was cognizant of a hundred and fifty thousand francs lent by Rigou in small mortgages on large estates. He possessed ostensibly real estate to the value of about fourteen thousand francs a year net. Thus Rigou was known to have about forty thousand francs a year. But, as to the amount of his hoard, that was an X of which no algebraic rule could find the value, just as the

devil alone knew about the matters that he brewed with Langlumé.

The redoubtable usurer, who expected to live twenty years longer, had invented fixed rules for his operations. He lent nothing to a peasant who did not buy at least three hectares, and who did not pay half of the price in cash. It will be seen that Rigou was well aware of the defect of the law concerning foreclosures as applied to small parcels of land, and of the risk imposed upon the Treasury and upon landowners by the excessive division of estates. What! prosecute a peasant who takes one furrow from you when he owns only five! The glance of private interest will always *distance* by twenty-five years that of an assembly of law-makers. What a lesson for a country! The law will always emanate from one vast brain, from one man of genius, and not from nine hundred intellects which, however great they may be, dwindle in size by being crowded together. Does not Rigou's law contain in effect the principle of the law that must be devised to put a stop to the nonsense of reducing estates to halves, thirds, fourths, tenths of a centiare, as in the commune of Argenteuil, where there are thirty thousand distinct parcels?

Such operations required a connection as extended as that which held a heavy hand on the arrondissement. As Rigou employed Lupin to draw about a third of all the documents that were drawn annually in his office, he found a devoted ally in the Soulanges notary. The pirate was able thus to include in the

contract—the borrower's wife being always present at its execution, when he was married—the sum to which the illegal interest amounted. The peasant, overjoyed to have to pay only five per cent. while the loan lasted, always hoped to discharge the debt by working like a madman and by the lavish use of fertilizers which would add to the value of Rigou's security.

Hence the deceitful prodigies brought forth by what idiotic economists call *small cultivation*, the result of a political mistake to which we owe the shipment of French money to Germany to pay for horses which we no longer raise,—a mistake which will eventually so diminish the production of horned cattle that fresh meat will soon be out of the reach, not of the common people alone, but of the petty bourgeoisie.—See *The Village Curé.*

Thus it happened that much perspiration flowed for Rigou's benefit between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes and still he was universally respected, whereas the labor for which the general was obliged to pay a high price, he being the only one who threw money away in the province, earned for him the curses and the hatred sworn against the rich. Would not such facts be inexplicable save for the glance we cast at mediocracy? Fourchon was right; the bourgeois were taking the places of the nobles. The small landowners, of the type represented by Courtecuisse, were the vassals of this Tiberius of the valley of the Avonne, just as in Paris the manufacturers without means are the peasants of the great banks.

SIBILET AND RIGOU

He had arrived just as the usurer was finishing his dessert.

* * * * * * * * *

When he saw Sibilet, Rigou bade him throw the bolts on the inside folding-doors which were fitted to each door, as much to deaden the sound of voices as to keep out the cold.

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Soudry followed Rigou's example from Soulanges to five leagues beyond Ville-aux-Fayes. The two usurers had divided the arrondissement between them.

Gaubertin, whose rapacity was exercised in a loftier sphere, not only did not compete with his associates, but he prevented the capital of Ville-aux-Fayes from taking that profitable course. The reader can now understand the influence that the triumvirate, Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin, exerted at the elections, through the electors whose fortunes depended upon their good-nature.

Hatred, intellect, and wealth, such were the elements of the terrible power of the enemy nearest at hand to Aigues, the spy upon the general, having constant dealings with sixty or eighty small proprietors, relatives or connections of the peasants, who feared him as a creditor is always feared.

Rigou rested upon Tonsard; one lived by thefts in kind, the other grew fat on legal plunder. Both were fond of good living; it was the same nature in two forms, one natural, the other sharpened by the education of the cloister.

When Vaudoyer left the *Grand-I-Vert* to consult the ex-mayor, it was about four o'clock. That was Rigou's dinner-hour.

Finding the low door closed, Vaudoyer peered over the curtains, crying:

"Monsieur Rigou, it's me, Vaudoyer—"

Jean came out through the porte cochère a moment later, and admitted him, saying:

"Come into the garden; monsieur has company."

The company was Sibilet, who, on the pretext of coming to an understanding with Rigou relative to the judgment of which Brunet had just served notice, was talking with him about something very different. He had arrived just as the usurer was finishing his dessert.

On a square table, covered with a dazzling cloth,—for Rigou, heedless of the labor imposed upon his wife and Annette, insisted upon clean table linen every day,—the steward saw a bowl of strawberries, apricots, peaches, figs, almonds, all the fruits of the season in profusion, served on plates of white china and vine-leaves, almost as daintily as at Aigues.

When he saw Sibilet, Rigou bade him throw the bolts on the inside folding-doors which were fitted to each door, as much to deaden the sound of voices as to keep out the cold, and asked him what urgent business led him to call upon him in broad daylight when they could confer together so much more safely at night.

"The Upholsterer has spoken of going to Paris to see the Keeper of the Seals; he is capable of doing you much injury, of asking for the removal of your son-in-law, the judges at Ville-aux-Fayes and the president, especially when he reads the judgment just delivered in your favor. He is getting restive, he's shrewd, he has in Abbé Brossette an adviser capable of fencing with you and Gaubertin. The priests are powerful. Monseigneur the Bishop is very fond of Abbé Brossette. Madame la Comtesse

said something about going to see her cousin the prefect, the Comte de Castéran, on the subject of Nicolas. Michaud is beginning to read our game easily."

"You're afraid," said the usurer, with a glance at Sibilet, which suspicion made less dull than usual, and which was terrible to see. "You're calculating whether it won't be better for you to take sides with Monsieur le Comte de Montcornet, I fancy?"

"Frankly, I can't see where, when you have parcelled out Aigues, I am going to get four thousand francs a year, honestly, to invest, as I have done the last five years," replied Sibilet, bluntly. "Monsieur Gaubertin has made me some fine promises in times past; but the crisis is approaching, there is certainly going to be a row: to promise and to keep a promise are two different things after the victory."

"I will speak to him," rejoined Rigou, coolly. "Meanwhile, this is the answer I would give, if it were my affair: 'For five years past you have carried four thousand francs a year to Monsieur Rigou, and that excellent man gives you seven and a half per cent., which makes your account figure up twenty-seven thousand francs to-day by reason of the accumulated interest; but as there is in existence a contract privately signed in duplicate between you and Rigou, the steward of Aigues would be dismissed on the day that Abbé Brossette placed that contract under the eye of the Upholsterer, especially after an anonymous letter advising him of the double rôle you are playing. So you would do better to

hunt with us, without demanding your bones in advance, especially as Monsieur Rigou, not being legally bound to allow you seven and a half per cent. and interest on interest, would pay your twenty thousand francs into court; and, before you could get your hand on them, your suit, protracted by pettifoggery, would have to be tried by the tribunal of Ville-aux-Fayes. If you govern your conduct prudently, when Monsieur Rigou is proprietor of your gate-house at Aigues, you will be able to go on with about thirty thousand francs, and thirty thousand more which Monsieur Rigou might place in your hands, all of which would be the more profitable to you in that the peasants will rush upon the Aigues estate, when it is divided into small lots, like poverty upon the world.' That is what Monsieur Gaubertin might well say to you; but, for my part, I have nothing to say, it's none of my business. Gaubertin and I have reason to complain of this child of the people who strikes his own father, and we are pursuing our idea. Friend Gaubertin may need you, but I need no one, for everybody is devoted to me. As for the Keeper of the Seals, he is changed pretty often; while we are always here."

"At all events, you are warned," said Sibilet, who felt as if he had been belabored like a donkey.

"Warned of what?" queried Rigou, slyly.

"Of what the Upholsterer will do," the steward humbly replied; "he has gone to the prefecture in a rage."

"Let him go! If the Montcornets didn't wear out wheels, what would become of the carriage-makers?"

"I will bring you three thousand francs at eleven o'clock to-night," said Sibilet; "but you ought to give my affairs a little boost by making over some of your matured mortgages to me—one of those that might put a few good lots of land in my way."

"I have Courtecuisse's, and I want to be easy with him, for he's the best shot in the department; if I transfer it to you, it will look as if you were bothering the fellow on the Upholsterer's account, and that will be killing two birds with one stone: he will be capable of anything when he finds himself lower down than Fourchon. Courtecuisse has ruined himself on the Bâchelerie, he has improved the ground and planted fruit-trees along the garden walls. The little place is worth four thousand francs, the count would give you that for the three acres adjacent to his game-cover. If Courtecuisse wasn't a sot, he could have paid his interest with the game that's killed there."

"Very well, make that mortgage over to me; I'll make my butter there and get the house and garden for nothing; the count will buy the three acres."

"What share will you give me?"

"My God! you could get milk from an ox!" cried Sibilet. "And when I have just got from the Upholsterer orders to regulate the gleaning according to law!"

"Have you really got that, my boy?" asked

Rigou, who had suggested the idea of these vexatious proceedings to Sibilet a few days before, telling him to advise the general to take them. "We have him, he is lost; but it's not enough to have him by one end, we must tie him up like a bale of tobacco! Draw the bolts, my boy: tell my wife to bring coffee and liqueurs, and Jean to harness up. I am going to Soulanges. Until to-night.—Good-day, Vaudoyer," said the ex-mayor, as he caught sight of his ex-keeper. "Well, what is it?"

Vaudoyer told him all that had taken place at the wine-shop, and asked Rigou's opinion as to the legality of the regulations contemplated by the general.

"He has the right to do it," replied Rigou, concisely. "We have a harsh lord and master; Abbé Brossette's a mischief-maker; your curé suggests all these measures because you don't go to mass, you pack of heretics! I go to mass myself! There's a God, you know! You will submit to everything, the Upholsterer will keep right on!"

"Very good, we will glean!" said Vaudoyer, with the determined accent that distinguishes the Burgundians.

"Without a pauper's certificate?" retorted the usurer. "They say he's gone to the prefecture to ask for troops, so as to keep you where you belong."

"We'll glean, as we always have," repeated Vaudoyer.

"Glean!—Monsieur Sarcus will decide whether

you are right," said the usurer, speaking as if he intended to assure the gleaners the protection of the justice of the peace.

"We shall glean, and we shall be in force!—or Bourgogne would be Bourgogne no longer!" said Vaudoyer. "If the gendarmes have sabres, we have scythes, and we'll see!"

At half-past four the great green gate of the former vicarage turned on its hinges, and the dark bay horse, led by Jean, came out into the square. Madame Rigou and Annette, who were standing on the steps leading to the low door, looked at the little green wicker carriole, with a leather hood, in which the master sat upon good cushions.

"Don't be late, monsieur," said Annette, with a little pout.

All the villagers, already informed of the threatening resolutions the mayor had formed, stood at their door or halted in the Grande Rue when they saw Rigou pass, thinking that he was going to Soulanges to defend them.

"Well, Madame Courtecuisse, our former mayor is going to defend us, no doubt," said an old spinstress who was deeply interested in the question of misdemeanors in the forest, for her husband sold wood stolen at Soulanges.

"My God! it makes his heart bleed to see what's going on, he's as unhappy over it as you," replied the poor woman, who trembled at the mere mention of her husband's creditor's name, and praised him through fear of him.

"Ah! you can't quite say that, but they've treated him badly enough!—Good-day, Monsieur Rigou," said the spinstress, to whom Rigou bowed, as well as to his debtor's wife.

When the usurer crossed the Thune, fordable at all seasons, Tonsard came out of his wine-shop and said to him on the road:

"Well, Père Rigou, so the Upholsterer wants us to be his dogs?"

"We'll see about that!" replied the usurer, whipping up his horse.

"He'll find a way to protect us," said Tonsard to a group of women and children crowded about him.

"He thinks as much of you as an innkeeper thinks of his gudgeons when he's cleaning his frying-pan," interposed Fourchon.

"Oh! take out the clapper of your bell when you're tight!" said Mouche, pulling his grandfather by the blouse and throwing him down on the bank at the foot of a poplar. "If that blackguard of a monk should hear that, you wouldn't sell him any more of your words for such a good price."

Rigou's hurried trip to Soulanges was in truth induced by the grave news imparted by the steward at Aigues, which seemed to him of threatening import to the secret coalition of the Avonnese bourgeoisie.

PART SECOND

I

THE FIRST SOCIETY OF SOULANGES

About six kilomètres from Blangy, to speak in legal phrase, and at an equal distance from Ville-aux-Fayes, upon a small hill, a ramification of the long slope parallel to that at whose base the Avonne flows, rises amphitheatre-fashion the little town of Soulanges, surnamed *the Pretty*, more justly, perhaps, than Mantes.

At the foot of the hill the Thune broadens out over a clayey bed of about thirty hectares in extent, at the end of which the mills of Soulanges, built upon numerous islets, form a cluster of buildings as pleasing to the eye as a landscape-gardener could devise. After flowing through the park of Soulanges, where it feeds lovely brooks and artificial ponds, the Thune empties into the Avonne through a magnificent canal.

The château of Soulanges, rebuilt under Louis XIV., upon plans drawn by Mansard, and one of the finest châteaux in Bourgogne, faces the town. Thus Soulanges and the château mutually afford each other an outlook no less splendid than chastely beautiful. The cantonal road winds between the town and the

pond, which is called, somewhat too pompously, the Lake of Soulanges by the country people.

This little town is one of those natural compositions which are excessively rare in France, where beauty of that sort is absolutely lacking. There you will find, in truth, the beauty of Switzerland, as Blondet said in his letter, the beauty of the neighborhood of Neufchâtel. The laughing vineyards which form a girdle about Soulanges complete the resemblance, leaving the Jura and the Alps out of the account; the streets, which rise one above another on the hillside, have few houses, for each house has its garden, the whole producing the masses of verdure that are so rare in great capitals. The blue or red roofs, peering out from among flowers, trees, and trellised terraces, present varied and harmonious aspects.

The church, an ancient structure dating back to the Middle Ages, built of stone by favor of the munificence of the lords of Soulanges, who reserved for themselves at first a chapel near the choir and subsequently a subterranean chapel, their necropolis, has for its portal, like the church at Longjumeau, a large arch with a fringe of decorated circles containing statuettes, and flanked by two pillars with niches terminating in little obelisks. This door, whose like is frequently found in the small churches of the Middle Ages that Chance has preserved from the ravages of Calvinism, is crowned by a triglyph, above which stands a carved Virgin holding the child Jesus. The wings are made up of five full arches designed

by mouldings and lighted by stained-glass windows. The apse rests upon flying-arches worthy of a cathedral. The steeple, which rises from one branch of the cross, is a square tower surmounted by a belfry. The church can be seen a long distance away, for it stands at the upper end of the public square, at whose lower end the road runs.

The square is of considerable width and is surrounded by original structures, all of different periods. Many, built half of wood and half of brick, with a jacket of slate on their timbers, date back to the Middle Ages. Others, built of stone and with balconies, displayed the gable end so dear to our ancestors, which dates from the twelfth century. Several of them attract attention by the old-fashioned protruding timbers, with grotesque faces carved thereon, —the protruding portions forming a sort of penthouse,—which recall the days when the bourgeoisie was a trading class pure and simple. The finest of them all is the former residence of the *bailli*, a house with a carved front, on a line with the church, to which it forms an admirable accompaniment. Sold as national property, it was purchased by the commune, which established the mayor's office there and the court of the justice of the peace, over which Monsieur Sarcus had presided ever since the organization of the court.

This brief sketch will enable the reader to form an idea of the public square of Soulanges, in the centre of which stood a beautiful fountain, brought from Italy in 1520 by the Maréchal de Soulanges, which

would not have been out of place in a great capital. A never-failing stream of water, from a spring on top of the hill, was distributed by four Loves in white marble, holding shells in their hands and with baskets filled with grapes on their heads.

Literary travellers who pass that way, if any such should ever follow in Blondet's footsteps, will be able to recognize that square, made famous by Molière and by the Spanish plays which held the French stage so long, and which prove for all time that comedy was born in a warm country, where people live in the public squares. The square of Soulanges furnishes a more effective reminder of that classic square, always the same on every stage, in that the two principal streets, cutting it exactly abreast of the fountain, represent the wings so essential to masters and servants as places for meeting or for running away. At the corner of one of those streets, called Rue de la Fontaine, is the sign of Maître Lupin. The Sarcus house, the tax collector Guerbet's, Brunet's, the clerk Gourdon's, and his brother's the doctor, and old Monsieur Gendrin-Vattebled's, head-keeper of the departments of Streams and Forests,—all of these houses, very neatly kept by their owners, who take the surname of their town seriously, are located in the neighborhood of the square, the aristocratic quarter of Soulanges.

Madame Soudry's house, for the forceful individuality of Mademoiselle Laguerre's former lady's maid had absorbed the headship of the family, was entirely modern; it was built by a rich wine-merchant, born

at Soulanges, who, after making his fortune in Paris, returned in 1793 to buy wheat for his native town. He was massacred there as a forestaller by the populace, who rose at the outcry of a wretched mason, Godain's uncle, who had had some trouble with him on the subject of his ambitious building.

The settlement of his inheritance, keenly contested by his collateral heirs, dragged out to such lengths that, in 1798, Soudry, on returning to Soulanges, was able to buy the wine-merchant's palace for three thousand francs in coin, and he let it at first to the department to be used as quarters for the gendarmerie. In 1811, Mademoiselle Cochet, whom Soudry consulted upon every subject, earnestly opposed the continuance of the lease, considering that the house was made uninhabitable by living in concubinage, as she said, with a barrack. The town of Soulanges, assisted by the department, thereupon built a house for the gendarmerie on a street at right angles to that on which the mayor's office was located. The brigadier put his house in order and restored its primitive lustre, which was somewhat tarnished by the occupation of the gendarmes and by its being used as a stable.

This house consists of two floors with attics under the roof, and has an unobstructed outlook on three sides, one facing the square, another the lake, and the third a garden. The fourth side looks on a courtyard which separated the Soudrys from the next house, occupied by a grocer named Wattebled, a man belonging to the *second society* and father of

the fair Madame Plissoud, of whom we shall soon hear.

All small towns have one *belle madame*, just as they have a Socquard and a Café de la Paix.

Everyone will guess that the front facing the lake is embellished by a terraced garden of moderate elevation, terminated by a stone balustrade along the cantonal road. You go down from that terrace into the garden by a staircase upon whose every step stands an orange-tree, a pomegranate, a myrtle, or some other ornamental tree, necessitating at the far end of the garden a hothouse—*serre*—which Madame Soudry persists in calling a *resserre*. You enter the house from the square by a flight of several steps. As is customary in small towns, the porte cochère, reserved for the use of the courtyard, for the master's horse, and for extraordinary arrivals, is rarely opened. The regular habitués of the house, all of whom come on foot, enter by the door on the square.

The architectural style of the Soudry mansion is uninteresting; the courses are separated by grooved fillets, so called; the windows are surrounded by mouldings, alternately light and heavy, in the style of those of the Gabriel and Perronet pavilions on Place Louis XV. Such ornamentation, in so small a town, imparts a monumental aspect to this celebrated house.

Opposite, at the other corner of the square, was the famous Café de la Paix, whose peculiarities and marvellous *Tivoli* will require later a description

somewhat less succinct than that of the Soudry mansion.

Rigou rarely came to Soulanges, for everyone went to him,—Lupin the notary and Gaubertin, Soudry, and Gendrin,—they all were so afraid of him. But we shall see that every man of intelligence, like the ex-Benedictine, would have imitated his reserve, from a cursory sketch, necessary at this point, of the persons of whom it was commonly said in the neighborhood: "They are the *first society* of Soulanges."

Of all these figures, the most original, as you have divined, was Madame Soudry, whose personality, to be accurately depicted, demands all the minute details of the painter's brush.

Madame Soudry indulged in a *soupçon* of rouge, in imitation of Mademoiselle Laguerre; but that slight tinge had changed by force of habit to the daubs of vermilion so picturesquely called chariot-wheels by our ancestors. As the wrinkles on her face became deeper and more numerous, the mayoress had conceived the idea of filling them with paint. Her forehead was growing altogether too yellow, too, so she made her temples glisten with a coating of white and represented the veins of youth with a faint network of blue lines. All this painting imparted excessive animation to her roguish eyes, so that her mask would have seemed more than odd to strangers, but her own social circle, being accustomed to this fictitious splendor, considered Madame Soudry very beautiful.

The tall, awkward, shambling creature, always in decolletée costume, exhibited her breast and back, whitened and polished by the same processes employed for the face; but, fortunately, in her desire to display her magnificent lace, she half concealed those chemical products. She always wore a hoop-skirt, the point of which descended very low, trimmed with bows of ribbon everywhere, even at the point! The skirt made a sort of squeaking noise, silk and furbelows were used so lavishly in its manufacture.

Her equipment, which justifies the use of the word *atours*, inexplicable at a later date, was of priceless damask on the evening in question, for Madame Soudry possessed a hundred costumes, each richer than the last, all from Mademoiselle Laguerre's immense and splendid wardrobe, and all made over by her in the style of 1808. The hair of her blond wig, curled and powdered, seemed to raise her magnificent cap made with bows of cherry satin to match the ribbons on her dress.

If you will imagine, beneath that ultra-coquettish cap, a monkey-like face, hideously ugly, in which the flat nose, shrivelled like that of Death, is separated by a broad tract of bearded flesh from the mouth with machine-made teeth, in which the tones of the voice get entangled as in a hunting-horn, you will find it hard to understand why the first society of the town, all Soulanges, in a word, should consider this quasi-queen beautiful, unless you remember the concise treatise, *ex professo*, which one of the brightest women of our day recently wrote upon the art of

beautifying one's self by means of the accessories with which a woman surrounds herself in Paris.

In the first place, Madame Soudry lived amid the magnificent gifts collected by her predecessor, which the ex-Benedictine called *fructus belli.* Then she made the most of her ugliness by exaggerating it, by assuming the air, the carriage, which are assumed only in Paris, and the secret of which is known to the most ordinary Parisian woman, always more or less of a monkey. She laced very tight, she wore an enormous bustle; at her ears were clusters of diamonds and her fingers were overloaded with rings. Lastly, on the upper edge of her corsets, between two mounds sprinkled with pearl-powder glistened a beetle composed of two topazes with a diamond head, a present from dear mistress, which was talked about throughout the department. Like her late mistress, she always had her arms bare and waved an ivory fan with a painting by Boucher, and with two little rose-diamonds set in the handle.

When she went out, Madame Soudry held over her head the genuine eighteenth-century parasol, that is to say, a cane with a green umbrella with green fringe spread at the end. A passer-by, spying her from afar as she was walking along the terrace, would have taken her for one of Watteau's figures.

In this salon, hung with red damask, with damask curtains lined with white silk, where the mantelshelf was covered with bric-a-brac of the good old days of Louis XV., with a fire on the hearth, with

little galleries, with lily stalks held aloft by Cupids—in the salon filled with claw-footed furniture in gilded wood, one could imagine the people of Soulanges speaking of the mistress of the house as the *beautiful Madame Soudry*. Thus the house had become the patriotic rallying-point of that chief town of the canton.

If the first society of the little town believed in its queen, its queen believed equally in herself. By a phenomenon which is not rare, and which a mother's or an author's vanity brings to pass every day before our eyes in respect to literary works or marriageable daughters, La Cochet had, in seven years, so thoroughly buried her former self in madame la mairesse, that not only had La Soudry ceased to remember her previous condition, but she believed herself to be a woman *comme il faut*. She had remembered so perfectly her mistress's motions of the head, her falsetto tones, her gestures, her little tricks of manner, that, when she succeeded to her opulent existence, she succeeded likewise to her impertinence. She had her eighteenth century, her anecdotes of great nobles and their pedigree at her fingers' ends. This antechamber erudition formed the basis of her conversation, which had a flavor of the *Œil-de-Bœuf*. And so, in those surroundings, her soubrette wit passed for good coin. Morally, the mayoress was, if you please, paste; but, so far as savages are concerned, is not paste as valuable as diamonds?

The woman understood how to arrange matters so that she should be fawned upon and deified, as her

mistress formerly was, by the members of her circle, who found a dinner waiting for them at her house every week, and coffee and liqueurs when they arrived at dessert, as not infrequently happened. No woman's head could have resisted the exhilarating power of that constant flow of incense. In winter the well-warmed salon, brilliantly lighted by wax-candles, was filled with the wealthiest bourgeois, who paid in fulsome praise for the exquisite wines and liqueurs from dear mistress's cellar. The habitués of the salon and their wives, the real beneficiaries of all this luxury, saved fuel and lights in this way. And do you know what people said for five leagues around, and even at Ville-aux-Fayes?

"Madame Soudry entertains wonderfully well," they said, passing in review the departmental notabilities; "she keeps open house; one is quite at home there. She knows how to do the honors of her fortune. She's full of her little jokes. And such fine plate! You can't find such another house outside of Paris!"

The plate, given by Bouret to Mademoiselle Laguerre, a magnificent service from the famous Germain, had been literally stolen by La Soudry. At Mademoiselle Laguerre's death she simply put it in her room, and there was nobody to claim it but heirs who knew nothing of the value of the inheritance.

For some time past, the twelve or fifteen persons who represented the first society of Soulanges had adopted the habit of speaking of Madame Soudry as

Mademoiselle Laguerre's intimate friend, kicking at the term *lady's maid*, and asserting that she had sacrificed herself for the cantatrice by becoming that great artiste's companion.

A strange thing but true! all these illusions, which had become realities, spread to the positive regions of the heart in Madame Soudry; she reigned tyrannically over her husband.

The gendarme, compelled to love a wife ten years older than himself, who kept her property in her own hands, confirmed her in the opinion she had conceived of her own beauty. Nevertheless, when people envied him, when they talked to him about his good fortune, the gendarme sometimes wished that they were in his place; for, to conceal his peccadilloes, he took such precautions as men take with a young and adored wife, and only within a few days had he been able to introduce a pretty maid-servant into the house.

The portrait of this queen, which may seem a little grotesque, but of which there were several copies to be met with in the provinces at that period, some with more or less noble blood in their veins, others connected with high financial circles,—witness the widow of a farmer-general in Touraine who still wore fillets of veal on her cheeks; this portrait, painted from nature, would be incomplete without the brilliants in which it was set, without the principal courtiers, whom it is necessary to sketch, were it only to explain how redoubtable such Liliputians may be, and what the organs of public opinion are in small

towns. Let there be no mistake—there are communities which, like Soulanges, are neither hamlets nor villages nor small towns, but bear some resemblance to all three. The faces of the people are very different from those we see in the bosom of the great, wicked provincial towns; country-life exerts an influence on morals, and the mixture of colors produces truly original figures.

After Madame Soudry, the most important personage was Lupin the notary, the agent of the Soulanges family; for it is useless to mention old Gendrin-Vattebled the head-keeper, a nonagenarian at death's door, who, since Madame Soudry's accession, had remained at home; but, after reigning over Soulanges, like a man who enjoyed his position, since the reign of Louis XV., he still talked, in his lucid moments, about the jurisdiction of the Marble Table.

Although he had seen forty-five summers, Lupin, fresh and pink, thanks to the *embonpoint* which inevitably comes to people who work in offices, still sang romantic ballads; consequently he retained the dandified costume of those who sing in salons. He seemed almost a Parisian in his carefully polished boots, his sulphur-colored waistcoats, his tight-fitting frock-coats, his handsome silk cravats, his fashionable trousers. He had his hair crimped by the hairdresser of Soulanges, the newspaper of the town, and maintained his reputation as a Don Juan by his liaison with Madame Sarcus, wife of Sarcus the Rich, who was in his life, with apologies for the comparison, what the Italian campaigns were to Napoléon.

He alone went to Paris, where he was received by the Soulanges. You would have guessed the supremacy he wielded in his capacity of dandy and arbiter in matters of fashion simply from hearing him speak. He pronounced himself upon every subject by a single word with three modifications, the artistic word *croûte*.*

A man, a woman, a piece of furniture might be *croûte;* then, in a superior degree of imperfection, *croûton;* and lastly, as a superlative term, *croûte-au-pot. Croûte-au-pot* was the *There is no such thing!* of artists, the climax of contempt. A *croûte* might throw off his incrustation, *croûton* was well-nigh hopeless, but *croûte-au-pot!* oh! far better never have come forth from nothingness! When it came to praise, he was reduced to a repetition of the word *charming*.—"It is charming!" was the positive degree of his admiration. "Charming! charming!"—you need have no fear. But: "Charming! charming! charming!"—the ladder could be taken away, for you had attained the zenith of perfection.

The *tabellion*—for he called himself *tabellion, garde-note, little notary,* jocosely placing himself above his profession—the *tabellion* did not go beyond the limits of gallant speech with madame la mairesse, who had a weakness for Lupin, although he was light and wore spectacles. La Cochet had never loved any but dark men with moustaches and tufts of hair on the backs of their fingers—Hercules, in short. But she made an exception in favor of

* Literally, a *crust;* familiar term for a poor painting, a *daub*.

Lupin, because of his elegance, and she thought, moreover, that her triumph at Soulanges would not be complete without an adorer; nevertheless, to Soudry's great disgust, the queen's adorers did not dare give their adoration an adulterous form.

The notary's voice was a tenor; he sometimes gave a specimen of it in a corner or on the terrace—a method of reminding people of his *power of entertaining*, the reef upon which all men who possess that power come to grief, even men of genius, alas!

Lupin had married an heiress in clogs and blue stockings, the only daughter of a dealer in salt, who made his fortune during the Revolution, a period when smugglers of salt made enormous profits by favor of the outcry against the salt-tax. He prudently left his wife at home, where Bébelle was content to remain because of a platonic passion for a very handsome clerk with no other fortune than his salary, one Bonnac, who played the same rôle in the second society that his employer played in the first.

Madame Lupin, who was a woman without any sort of education, appeared on great days only, in the shape of an enormous cask of Bourgogne arrayed in velvet and surmounted by a small head buried between shoulders of a doubtful hue. No device could keep her belt in its proper place. Bébelle ingeniously confessed that prudence forbade her to wear corsets. The imagination of a poet, or, better still, of an inventor, could not have found in Bébelle's back a trace of the seductive sinuosity

produced by the vertebræ in the backs of all women who are women.

Bébelle was as round as a turtle, she belonged to the invertebrate females. Such alarming development of the cellular tissue reassured Lupin as to the corpulent Bébelle's little passion; he called her Bébelle boldly, without making anybody laugh.

"What is your wife?" queried Sarcus the Rich, who could not digest the expression *croûte-au-pot* applied one day by Lupin to a piece of second-hand furniture he had bought.

"My wife isn't like yours, she hasn't been classified yet," was the retort.

Lupin concealed a subtle wit beneath his coarse envelope; he had the good sense to keep silent as to his fortune, which was at least as considerable as Rigou's.

Monsieur Lupin's son, Amaury, drove his father to despair. An only son, and one of the Don Juans of the valley, he refused to follow the paternal profession; he abused his position as an only son by making enormous drafts on the strong-box, without ever exhausting the indulgence of his father, who said at every escapade: "I was like that once myself!" Amaury never went to see Madame Soudry, who bored him terribly, for she had undertaken, impelled thereto by a reminiscence of her experience as lady's maid, to educate the young man, whom his love of pleasure led to the billiard-room of the Café de la Paix. There he consorted with the dregs of Soulanges society, and even with the Bonnébaults. He

was sowing his wild oats,* and answered his father's remonstrances with the never-ending refrain: "Send me to Paris; I am bored to death here!"

Lupin ended, alas! like all *beaux*, in a quasi-conjugal attachment. His avowed flame was the wife of the second usher at the court of the justice of the peace, Madame Euphémie Plissoud, from whom he had no secrets. The fair Madame Plissoud, daughter of Wattebled the grocer, reigned in the second society as Madame Soudry did in the first. Plissoud, Brunet's unfortunate competitor, belonged, therefore, to the second society of Soulanges, for his wife's conduct, which he authorized, so people said, had earned for him the contempt of the first society.

If Lupin was the musician of the first society, Monsieur Gourdon, the physician, was its scholar. People said of him: "We have here a scholar of the first order."—Just as Madame Soudry—who knew all about music from having ushered Gluck and Piccini into her mistress's apartments in the morning and from having dressed Mademoiselle Laguerre at the Opéra—persuaded everybody, even Lupin, that he would have made his fortune with his voice; so she regretted that the physician would not publish any of his ideas.

Monsieur Gourdon simply repeated the ideas of Buffon and Cuvier concerning the globe, which fact alone could hardly have made him appear a scholar

* In the original: "Il jetait sa *gourme*"—Madame Soudry's expression—for Il jetait sa gourme, an idiomatic expression equivalent to "he was sowing his wild oats."

in the eyes of the people of Soulanges; but he had a collection of shells and a herbarium, and he knew how to stuff birds;—in fact, he coveted the glory of bequeathing a cabinet of natural history to the town of Soulanges: therefore he was regarded throughout the department as a great naturalist, the successor of Buffon.

This physician, who resembled a Genevan banker, —for he had the same cold, pedantic manner and puritan-like neatness without the money and the calculating spirit,—exhibited with exceeding good nature his famous cabinet, comprising a bear and a marmot that died as they were on the way to Soulanges; all the rodents of the department, field-mice, blind mice, common mice, rats, etc.; all the curious birds killed in Bourgogne, among which an Alpine eagle, taken in the Jura, shone resplendent. Gourdon possessed a collection of lepidoptera, a word which made everybody hope for monstrosities, and which caused those who saw them to exclaim: "Why, they're butterflies!"—also a great heap of fossil shells from the collections of several of his friends who bequeathed him their shells when they died; and lastly, the minerals of Bourgogne and the Jura.

These treasures, bestowed in cupboards with glass doors and with drawers containing a collection of insects, occupied the whole first floor of the Gourdon mansion, and produced considerable effect by the oddity of the labels, by the magical beauty of the colors, and by the juxtaposition of so many objects to which we do not pay the least attention when we

fall in with them in nature, but which we admire greatly under glass. People took a whole day to inspect Monsieur Gourdon's cabinet.

"I have," he would say to visitors, "five hundred ornithological specimens, two hundred mammifera, five thousand insects, three thousand shells, and seven hundred specimens of minerals."

"What patience you have had!" the ladies said to him.

"One must do something for one's country," he would reply.

And he derived enormous profit from his carcasses by the phrase: "I have left everything to the town by will." And the visitors admired his *philanthropy!* There was some talk of devoting the whole second floor of the mayor's office to the *Museum Gourdon, after the death* of the doctor.

"I rely upon the gratitude of my fellow-citizens to see that my name is given to it," he would reply to that proposition, "for I dare not hope that my bust in marble will be placed there."

"Indeed! why, that will be the least they can do for you," some one would say; "aren't you the glory of Soulanges?"

And the man had come at last to look upon himself as one of the celebrities of Bourgogne; the most solid income is not that produced by investment in government bonds, but that which one pays one's self in self-esteem. This scientist was, to employ Lupin's system of expression, happy, happy, happy!

Gourdon the clerk, a wizened little man, all of

whose features were heaped up around his neck, so that the nose seemed to be the point of departure of the forehead, the cheeks, and the mouth, all of which started from it as the ravines in a mountain all start from the summit, was considered one of the greatest poets in Bourgogne,—a Piron, people said. The twofold merit of the two brothers caused such remarks as this to be made about them in the chief town of the department:

"We have at Soulanges the two Gourdon brothers, two very distinguished men, two men who would do themselves credit at Paris."

Being an exceedingly expert player at cup and ball, the mania for playing it engendered in the clerk another mania, that of singing the praises of the game, which was all the rage in the eighteenth century. In *mediocrats* manias often go two by two. Gourdon the younger gave birth to his poem under the reign of Napoléon. Is not that equivalent to telling you to what healthy and judicious school he belonged? Luce de Lancival, Parny, Saint-Lambert, Roucher, Vigée, Andrieux, Berchoux, were his heroes. Delille was his god until the day when the first society of Soulanges agitated the question whether Gourdon was not superior to Delille, whom the clerk thenceforth, with exaggerated courtesy, called *Monsieur l'Abbé* Delille.

The poems produced between 1780 and 1814 were cut by the same pattern, and the one on cup and ball will explain them all. They all had a little of the savor of that *tour de force*. *Le Lutrin* is the Saturn

of that abortive generation of jocular poems, almost all in four cantos, for it was admitted that in extending them to six cantos there was danger of wearing out the subject.

This poem by Gourdon, called *La Bilboquéide*,* conformed to the poetic system of those departmental works, all of which followed the same invariable line of construction; they contained in the first canto the description of the subject, beginning, as in Gourdon's case, with an invocation of which this is the type:

"Je chante ce doux jeu qui sied a tous les âges,
Aux petits comme aux grands, aux fous ainsi qu'aux sages;
Où notre agile main, au front d'un bois pointu,
Lance un globe à deux trous dans les airs suspendu;
Jeu charmant, des ennuis infaillible remède,
Que nous eût envié l'inventeur Palamède!
O Muse des amours, et des jeux et des ris,
Descends jusqu' à mon toit, où, fidèle à Thémis,
Sur le papier du fisc j'espace des syllabes!
Viens charmer—" †

After defining the game and describing the finest known *bilboquets*, after giving us to understand how it used to help along the business of the *Green Monkey* and other dealers in toys, after proving how well the

* *Bilboquet* is the French name for cup and ball.

† "I sing of that sweet game, adapted to all ages,
To great and small alike, to fools and wise;
In which our skilful hand, upon a pointed stick,
Tosses a ball with two holes bored therein;
A charming game, of ennui the unfailing cure,
Which Palamedes the inventor might have envied us!
O muse of loves, of laughter, and of games,
Descend to my poor roof, where I, to Themis true,
Mark off the feet on ruled official paper!
Come and charm—"

game illustrated the science of statics, Gourdon brought his first canto to a close with these lines, which will remind you of the conclusion of the first canto of all those poems:

> " C'est ainsi que les arts et le science même
> A leur profit enfin font tourner un objet
> Qui n'était de plaisir qu'un frivole sujet." *

The second canto, intended, as always, to set forth the manner of making use of the *object*, the advantages to be derived from it in one's relations with the ladies and in society, will be divined from beginning to end by the friends of that virtuous form of literature, with the help of this quotation, which describes the player going through the exercises under the eyes of the *beloved object:*

> " Regardez ce joueur, au sein de l'auditoire,
> L'œil fixé tendrement sur le globe d'ivoire.
> Comme il épie et guette avec attention
> Ses moindres mouvements dans leur precision!
> La boule a, par trois fois, décrit sa parabole,
> D'un factice encensoir il flatte son idole;
> Mais le disque est tombé sur son poing maladroit,
> Et d'un baiser rapide il console son doigt.
> Ingrat! ne te plains pas de ce léger martyre,
> Bienheureux accident, trop payé d'un sourire!" †

* " 'Tis thus that all the arts and sciences too
Succeed in turning to their own advantage
Things that were naught but pleasure's frivolous adjuncts."

† " Observe yon player, sitting in your midst,
His eye fixed fondly on the ivory globe.
How he doth watch with close and careful glance
Its slightest movements in their strange precision!
Thrice has the ball its brief parabola described,

It was this description, worthy of Virgil himself, which first cast a doubt upon Delille's superiority to Gourdon. The word *disque*, objected to by the positive Brunet, furnished food for discussions which lasted eleven months; but Gourdon the scholar, at an evening party where both sides were on the point of *turning red* with anger, crushed the *antidisquaires* by this remark:

"The moon, called a disk by the poets, is a globe."

"What do you know about it?" retorted Brunet. "We never saw but one side of it."

The third canto contained the necessary story, the famous anecdote concerning the game. Everybody knows the anecdote by heart; it concerns a celebrated minister of Louis XVI.; but, according to the formula established in the *Débats* from 1810 to 1814 for praising public works of that sort, *it borrowed fresh charm from the poetic grace and the embellishments which the author had lavished upon it throughout.*

The fourth canto, in which the whole work was summed up, ended with this bold flight, which was not published from 1810 to 1814, but saw the light in 1824, after Napoléon's death:

"Ainsi j'osais chanter en des temps pleins d'alarmes.
Ah! si les rois jamais ne portaient d'autres armes,
Si les peuples jamais, pour charmer leurs loisirs,
N'avaient imaginé que de pareils plaisirs,

With artificial incense he his idol flatters;
But the disk has fallen on his awkward hand,
And with a rapid kiss he soothes his injured finger.
Ingrate! complain not of that petty hurt,
A blessed mishap, too richly with a smile rewarded!"

Notre Bourgogne, hélas! trop longtemps éplorée,
Eût retrouvé les jours de Saturne et de Rhée!" *

These fine verses were copied in the edition *princeps*, the only one issued from the presses of Bournier, printer at Ville-aux-Fayes.

A hundred subscribers, at three francs each, assured this poem an immortality most dangerous as an example, and it was the more noble on their part in that each one of the hundred had heard it from beginning to end well-nigh a hundred times.

Madame Soudry had recently suppressed the game, which was kept upon the console in the salon, and for seven years had furnished a pretext for quotations; she discovered at last that the bilboquet had become her rival.

As for the author, who boasted of possessing a well-supplied portfolio, we can describe him sufficiently by stating in what terms he announced one of his rivals to the first society of Soulanges.

"Have you heard the strange news?" he had said two years before. "There's *another poet* in Bourgogne!—Yes," he continued, seeing general amazement depicted on the faces about him, "he is of Mâcon. But you could never imagine *what sort of work he's doing!* He puts the clouds in verse."

* "Thus ventured I to sing in times of dire alarm.
Ah! if our kings would bear no other arms,
If peoples never had, their leisure to employ,
Imagined other pleasures than such charming games,
Our dear Bourgogne, too long, alas! afflicted,
Would have found once more the days of Saturn and of Rhea!"

"Why, they're very well off already in *white*,"* observed the witty Père Guerbet.

"There's such a conglomeration as you never saw! Lakes and stars and waves! Not a single reasonable image, not a sign of didactic purpose; he has no idea of the sources of poetry. He calls the sky by its name, he says the *moon* outright instead of the *star of night*. And that's what the desire to be original brings us to!" cried Gourdon, piteously. "Poor young man! to be a Burgundian and to sing of the water, that makes one ill! If he had consulted me, I would have suggested the finest subject in the world, a poem on wine, *La Bacchéide!* which I feel that I am too old now to undertake."

That great poet is still ignorant of the greatest of his triumphs, though he owed it to the fact that he is a Burgundian: the triumph of having engaged the attention of the town of Soulanges, which knows absolutely nothing, not even the names, of the modern Pleiades!

A hundred Gourdons sang under the Empire, and yet that period is accused of neglecting letters!—Consult the *Journal de la Librairie*, and you will see three poems on Tricks, on the game of Checkers, Backgammon, Geography, Typography, Comedy, etc., to say nothing of Delille's boasted masterpieces on Pity, Imagination, and Conversation; and those of Berchoux on Gastronomy, the Dancing Mania, etc. Perhaps, fifty years hence, it will be the fashion to laugh at the innumerable poems on the model of the

* The French word here used—*blanc*—means equally *white* and *blank* (verse).

Méditations, the *Orientales*, etc. Who can foretell the mutations of taste, the caprices of fashion, and the transformations of the human mind? The generations, as they pass, sweep away the last vestige of the idols they find in their path, and they forge for themselves new gods who will be overthrown in their turn.

Sarcus, a handsome little dapple-gray old man, devoted himself at once to Themis and to Flora, that is to say, to legislation and to hothouses. He had been meditating for twelve years a book on the *History of the Establishment of Justices of the Peace*, "whose political and literary character had already passed through several phases," he said, "for they were everything by the Code of Brumaire of the year IV., and to-day that branch of magistracy, of such value to the country, has lost its importance, for lack of salaries proportioned to the importance of the functions of the magistrates, who should hold office for life." Being accredited with the possession of a strong mind, Sarcus was accepted as the politician of the salon; you will guess that he was far and away its greatest bore. People said of him that he talked like a book; Gaubertin promised him the Legion of Honor, but he postponed the award until the day when, as Leclercq's successor, he should take his seat on the benches of the Left-Centre.

Guerbet, the tax-collector, the wit, a corpulent, heavy worthy, with a face like butter, a false top-knot, and wearing gold ear-rings, which were constantly at odds with his shirt-collars, was an

enthusiast in pomology. Proud of possessing the finest fruit orchard in the arrondissement, he obtained early fruits a month later than they were offered for sale in Paris; he raised in his hot-beds the most tropical products, pineapples to wit, and nectarines and petits pois. He proudly carried a bunch of strawberries to Madame Soudry, when they were worth only ten sous a basket in Paris.

Lastly, Soulanges possessed in Monsieur Vermut the apothecary a chemist who was rather more of a chemist than Sarcus was of a statesman, Lupin a musician, Gourdon the elder a scientist, or his brother a poet. Nevertheless, the first society of the town made little of Vermut, and so far as the second society was concerned, he had no existence. The instinct of some pointed out to them, perhaps, the real superiority of this thinker who never spoke, and who smiled at the idiotic remarks of his neighbors with such a sly expression that they were suspicious of his knowledge, concerning which doubts were expressed in whispers; as for the others, they did not take the trouble to think about him at all.

Vermut was the butt of Madame Soudry's salon. No social circle is complete without a victim, without a creature to pity, to laugh at, to despise, to patronize. In the first place, Vermut, being absorbed by scientific problems, often appeared with his cravat untied, his waistcoat open, and a little green frock-coat always spotted. And then he invited witticisms by a face of so brilliant a hue that Père

Guerbet maintained that he had ended by acquiring the features of his customers.

In the provinces, in towns like Soulanges, that are far behind the times, apothecaries are still employed in the sense of Pourceaugnac's jest.* Those honorable tradesmen submit to it the more readily because they exact a reward for their trouble.

This little man, blessed with a chemist's patience, *could not enjoy*—as they say in the provinces to express the abolition of domestic authority—Madame Vermut, a charming, jovial woman, and a most agreeable gambler,—she could lose forty sous without a word,—who scolded her husband, hunted him with her epigrams, and described him as an imbecile who could distil nothing but *ennui*. Madame Vermut, who was one of those women who play the part of leader of the revels in small towns, furnished salt for that little circle, kitchen salt, to be sure, but such salt! She indulged in jests that were a little broad, but people suffered them from her; she actually said to Taupin the curé, a white-haired man of seventy:

"Hold your tongue, you little rascal!"

The miller of Soulanges, who possessed about fifty thousand francs a year, had an only daughter, whom Lupin was thinking of for Amaury since he had lost the hope of marrying him to Mademoiselle Gaubertin, and President Gaubertin was thinking

* In Moliere's farce, *Pourceaugnac*, the titular role presents a provincial who goes to Paris to seek a wife and becomes the victim of constant deception and ridicule. Hence the word *Pourceaugnac* has become a synonym for provincial ridicule and banter.

of her for his son, the recorder of mortgages—another cause of antagonism.

This miller, a Sarcus-Taupin, was the Nucingen of the town; he was supposed to be a millionaire thrice over; but he would go into no combinations; he thought of nothing but grinding grain and of monopolizing the trade, and he was remarkable for his absolute lack of courtesy and good manners.

Père Guerbet, brother of the postmaster at Conches, possessed an income of about ten thousand francs besides his fees as collector. The Gourdons were rich; the doctor had married the daughter of old Monsieur Gendrin-Vattebled, the head-keeper of the department of Streams and Forests, *who was expected to die;* and the clerk had married the niece and only heir of Abbé Taupin, curé of Soulanges, a fat priest who lived in retirement in his curacy, like a rat in his cheese.

This clever ecclesiastic, a devoted adherent of the first society, kindly and obliging to the second, apostolic to the unfortunate, had won everybody's heart at Soulanges; a cousin of the miller and of the Sarcuses, he belonged to the province and to the Avonnese mediocracy. He always dined out, he economized, he went to weddings and withdrew before the dancing; he never talked politics; he provided for the necessities of the church, saying: "It's my trade!" and his people allowed him to do it, saying of him: "We have a good curé!" The bishop, who knew the people of Soulanges, deemed himself very fortunate, although he was not deceived as to the

real worth of the curé, to have in such a place a man who made the religion acceptable, who succeeded in filling his church, and in preaching to a sleeping congregation.

The two *dames* Gourdon—for in Soulanges, as in Dresden and some other German capitals, people in the first society greet each other with: "How is your *dame?*" * They say: "He was not with his *dame;* I saw his *dame* and his *demoiselle,*—unmarried daughter,"—etc. A Parisian would cause a scandal there, and be accused of bad form, if he said: "The *femmes,* that *femme,*" etc. At Soulanges, as at Geneva, Dresden, Brussels, you find only *épouses:* they do not, to be sure, put on the signs as in Brussels: "*Epouse So-and-So;* but *madame votre épouse* is the only accepted way of speaking of a wife to her husband;—the two *dames* Gourdon, we say, can only be compared to the wretched supernumeraries at secondary theatres, whom Parisians know only from having often made sport of those *artistes;* and, to complete the picture of these *dames,* we need only say that they belonged to the class of *good little women;* the least lettered bourgeois will upon this hint recognize among their neighbors the models of those essential creatures.

It is needless to remark that Père Guerbet had an extensive knowledge of finance, and that Soudry was capable of being Minister of War. Thus, not only did each of those excellent bourgeois present one of those special manifestations of caprice so essential to the

* *Dame, femme, épouse,* different words meaning wife.

existence of the provincial, but each of them cultivated without a rival his field in the domain of vanity.

If Cuvier had passed through Soulanges without giving his name, the first society would have found him guilty of knowing very little compared with Monsieur Gourdon the physician. "Nourrit and his *pretty little thread of a voice*," said the notary, with patronizing indulgence, "would hardly be deemed worthy to accompany the nightingale of Soulanges." As for the author of the *Bilboquéide*, which was just being printed at Bournier's, no one believed that a poet of such power could be found in Paris, for Delille was dead!

This provincial bourgeoisie, being filled with such smug self-satisfaction, could vaunt itself upon its superiority in all social matters. Only those people who have lived some part of their lives in a town of that description can imagine the expression of profound self-content on the faces of those people, who believed themselves to be the solar plexus of France, all armed with incredible skill to do evil, who, in their wisdom, had decided that one of the heroes of Essling was a coward, that Madame de Montcornet was an intriguing creature, *qui avait de gros boutons dans le dos*,* that Abbé Brossette was an ambitious little priest, and who discovered, a fortnight after the sale of Aigues, the plebeian origin of the general, whom they thereupon christened the Upholsterer.

* Literally,—"who had great buttons in her back;" but the expression cannot be aptly rendered in English.

If Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin had all lived at Ville-aux-Fayes, they would have fallen out; their pretensions would inevitably have come in collision, but fatality decreed that the Lucullus of Blangy should feel the necessity of solitude to bask at his ease in usury and luxurious living; that Madame Soudry should be shrewd enough to understand that she could reign nowhere else than at Soulanges, and that Ville-aux-Fayes should be the centre of Gaubertin's interests. They who find entertainment in the study of social nature will confess that luck was against General de Montcornet in raising up against him such foes, who exercised their power and their vanity at such distances from one another that they could not interfere with one another's action, and that their power of doing harm was increased tenfold.

Nevertheless, although all these worthy bourgeois, proud of their comfortable circumstances, looked upon their society as vastly superior in attractiveness to that of Ville-aux-Fayes, and repeated with comical gravity this dictum of the valley: "Soulanges is a town of pleasure and social enjoyment," it would be far from prudent to assume that the Avonnese capital admitted that supremacy. The Gaubertin salon made sport of the Soudry salon, under the rose. By the tone in which Gaubertin said: "We are a commercial town, a business town, we are foolish enough to give our attention to making our fortunes!" it was easy to detect a slight antagonism between the earth and the moon. The

moon considered itself useful to the earth, and the earth domineered over the moon. But the earth and the moon kept most closely in touch with each other. At the carnival, the first society of Soulanges went always in a body to the four balls given by Gaubertin, by Gendrin, by Leclercq, the receiver of taxes, and by the younger Soudry, the king's attorney. Every Sunday, the king's attorney, his wife, Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Elisa Gaubertin dined with the Soudrys at Soulanges. When the sub-prefect was invited, when the postmaster, Monsieur Guerbet of Conches, dropped in to take pot-luck, Soulanges witnessed the spectacle of four official equipages at the door of the Soudry mansion.

II

THE CONSPIRATORS IN THE QUEEN'S SALON

Upon reaching Soulanges, about half-past five, Rigou knew that he should find the habitués of the Soudry salon all at their posts. At the mayor's, as everywhere else in town, dinner was at three o'clock, according to the custom of the last century. From five o'clock to nine, the notables of Soulanges assembled to exchange gossip, to make their political *speeches*, to talk over recent incidents in the private life of the whole valley, and to talk about Aigues, which was the topic of conversation for an hour every day. It was everybody's endeavor to learn something about what was going on there, and, furthermore, they knew that that was a most excellent way to pay court to the master and mistress of the house.

After this obligatory review of the news, they began to play boston, the only game the queen knew. When vulgar Père Guerbet had mimicked Madame Isaure, Gaubertin's wife, making sport of her languishing airs, and imitating her affected voice, her little mouth, and her kittenish ways; when

Abbé Taupin had told one of the anecdotes from his repertory; when Lupin had contributed some item of news from Ville-aux-Fayes, and Madame Soudry had been riddled with sickening compliments, they would say: "We have had a delightful game!"

Too selfish to take the trouble to travel a dozen kilomètres, at the end of which he would be obliged to listen to the senseless remarks of the frequenters of that salon and to see a monkey disguised as an old woman, Rigou, who was vastly superior in education and in intellect to that petty bourgeoisie, never appeared there unless business called him to the notary's office. He had claimed exemption from the custom of calling on his neighbors, on the ground of his business cares, his habits, and his health, which would not permit him, he said, to return at night along a road that skirted the mist-laden banks of the Thune.

The tall, thin usurer, by the way, inspired awe in Madame Soudry's circle, which scented in him the tiger with claws of steel, the savage malevolence, the shrewdness born in the cloister and ripened in the sunbeams of gold, with which Gaubertin had never been willing to deal frankly.

As soon as the horse and the wicker carriole passed the Café de la Paix, Urbain, Soudry's servant, who was talking with the proprietor, sitting on a bench under the windows of the dining-room, made a screen of his hand to see whose equipage it was.

"There's Père Rigou!—I must go and open the

door. Hold his horse, Socquard," he said familiarly to the proprietor of the café.

Thereupon Urbain, an ex-cavalryman, who, failing to be promoted to the gendarmerie, had entered Soudry's service as a quasi-retirement, returned to the house to open the courtyard gate.

Socquard, a personage famous throughout the valley, did not stand upon his dignity, as you see; but so it is with many illustrious people who are obliging enough to walk and yawn and sleep and eat exactly like ordinary mortals.

Socquard, a Hercules from his birth, could lift eleven hundredweight; a blow of his fist upon a man's back would break the spinal column short off; he could twist an iron bar, he could stop a carriage drawn by a horse. The Milo of Crotona of the valley, his reputation embraced the whole department, where ridiculous tales were told about him as about all celebrities. For instance, it was said that one day in the Morvan he had carried a poor woman, her ass, and her bag to market on his back, that he had eaten a whole ox and drunk a whole cask of wine in a single day, etc. Socquard was a short, stout man, gentle as a maiden in her teens, with a placid face, broad shoulders, and a brawny chest in which his lungs played like the bellows of a forge, possessed a piping voice, whose clear tone surprised all those who heard it for the first time.

Like Tonsard, whose renown made it unnecessary for him to offer any proof of his ferocity, as is the case with all those who live upon the public

opinion in any way shown, Socquard never displayed his mighty muscular strength unless his friends begged him to do so. He took the horse's rein when the king's attorney's father-in-law turned to draw up by the steps.

"All right at home, Monsieur Rigou?" said the illustrious Socquard.

"As right as a trivet, my good friend," Rigou replied. "Do Plissoud and Bonnébault, Viallet and Amaury, still support your establishment?"

This question, asked in a tone of good-humored interest, was not one of the commonplace questions tossed at random by a superior to an inferior. In his leisure moments, Rigou turned his attention to the most trivial details, and the intimacy of Bonnébault, Plissoud, and the brigadier Viallet had already been pointed out to him by Fourchon as a suspicious circumstance.

Bonnébault was quite capable of betraying the peasants' secrets to the brigadier for a few crowns lost at play, or of talking without realizing the importance of his chatter after he had drunk a few too many bowls of punch. But the otter-hunter's disclosures might be impelled by thirst, and Rigou paid no attention to them except so far as they concerned Plissoud, whose situation might well inspire in him a desire to defeat the schemes on foot against Aigues, were it for no other reason than to have his paws greased by one or other of the parties.

Being a correspondent of the insurance companies which were just beginning to appear in France, and

an agent of a society that insured against the chance of being drafted, the bailiff was accumulating occupations which were by no means lucrative, and he found it the more difficult to make his fortune in that he had the vice of being fond of billiards and mulled wine. Like Fourchon, he cultivated with care the art of doing nothing, and he awaited a fortune as the result of some problematical chance. He had a profound hatred for the first society, but he had gauged its power. Plissoud was perfectly acquainted with the bourgeois tyranny established by Gaubertin; he pursued with his mockery the rich men of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, representing the whole opposition in his single person. Without influence or wealth, he did not seem a person to be feared; and so Brunet, overjoyed to have a competitor who was universally looked down upon, patronized him in order to prevent his selling his office to some enthusiastic young man, like Bonnac for example, with whom he would have had to divide the business of the canton.

"Thanks to those people, everything's all right," replied Socquard, "but they're beginning to imitate my mulled wine!"

"You must pursue," said Rigou, sententiously.

"That would carry me too far," said the wine-shop-keeper, unconsciously playing upon the words.

"Do your customers get along well together?"

"Sometimes they have a little row; but gamblers will forgive each other anything, you know."

All heads were at the window of the salon that

looked on the square. On recognizing his son's wife's father, Soudry went to the door to greet him.

"Well, my friend,"—*compère*,—said Soudry, using that word in its original acceptation, "is Annette sick that you give us your company of an evening?"

As a result of his experience as a gendarme, the mayor always went straight to the point.

"No, there's trouble brewing," replied Rigou, touching Soudry's outstretched hand with his right forefinger; "we'll have a talk about it, for it concerns our children to some extent."

Soudry, a handsome man, dressed in blue as if he still belonged to the gendarmerie, with the black stock and boots with spurs, took Rigou's arm and led him to his imposing better half. The long window opening on the terrace was open and the guests were walking about outside, enjoying the summer evening that brought out all the beauties of the superb landscape, of which people endowed with imagination can form an idea from the sketch they have read.

"It's a long time since we saw you, my dear Rigou," said Madame Soudry, taking the ex-Benedictine's arm and leading him out upon the terrace.

"My digestion is so bad!" the old usurer replied. "Look! my color's almost as bright as yours."

Rigou's appearance on the terrace caused, as we can imagine, an explosion of cheery greetings from all those who were present.

"Laugh, glutton!—I've discovered another," cried Monsieur Guerbet the collector, offering his hand to Rigou, who placed his right forefinger therein.

"Not bad! not bad!" said the little justice of the peace Sarcus; "our good lord of Blangy is a glutton and no mistake."

"Lord!" replied Rigou, bitterly; "for a long while now I haven't been the cock of my village!"

"That's not what the hens say, you bad man!" said La Soudry, tapping Rigou playfully with her fan.

"Everything all right, my dear master?" said the notary, as he saluted his principal client.

"So-so," replied Rigou, again putting out his forefinger, this time to the notary.

That motion, adopted by Rigou to confine the handshake to the coldest of demonstrations, would have painted the man's character *in toto* to one who did not know him.

"Let us find a corner where we can have a quiet talk," said the ex-monk, glancing at Lupin and Madame Soudry.

"Let's go back to the salon," suggested the queen. "These gentlemen," she added, indicating Monsieur Gourdon the physician and Guerbet, "are at odds over a *point de coté*—" *

Madame Soudry had inquired as to the point under discussion; Guerbet, always so witty, had told her it was a *point de coté*. The queen supposed that it was a scientific term, and Rigou smiled when he heard her repeat the words with a knowing air.

"What new trick has the Upholsterer been up to?" asked Soudry, taking a seat beside his wife and putting his arm about her waist.

* Slang phrase, meaning *nuisance*.

Like all old women, La Soudry forgave many things in return for a public demonstration of affection.

"Why," replied Rigou, in an undertone, to set an example of discretion, "he has gone to the prefecture to demand execution of the judgments and a force to assist."

"That's his loss," observed Lupin, rubbing his hands. "The people will fight."

"Will they fight?" said Soudry; "that depends. If the prefect and the commanding general, who are friends of his, send down a squadron of cavalry, the peasants won't fight at all. If worst comes to worst, they might get the better of the Soulanges gendarmes; but as to trying to stand up against a cavalry charge!"

"Sibilet heard him say something more dangerous than that, and that's what brings me here," continued Rigou.

"Oh, my poor Sophie!" cried Madame Soudry, sentimentally, "into what hands Aigues has fallen! This is what the Revolution has brought us to: swaggering bullies in epaulets! They ought to have remembered that when you tip up the bottle the dregs go to the top and spoil the wine!"

"He intends to go to Paris and arrange with the Keeper of the Seals to change the whole court."

"Aha!" said Lupin, "he has seen where his danger lies."

"If my son-in-law's appointed advocate-general, there's nothing to be said, and he'll fill his place with some Parisian he can depend on," continued

Rigou. "If he asks for a seat in the royal court for Monsieur Gendrin, if he has Monsieur Guerbet, our examining magistrate, made president at Auxerre, he'll upset our game!—He already has the gendarmes on his side; if he has the court, too, and if he keeps such advisers as Abbé Brossette and Michaud, we sha'n't be in at the wedding; he might make very serious trouble for us."

"How is it that in five years you haven't been able to get rid of Abbé Brossette?" said Lupin.

"You don't know him; he's as suspicious as a blackbird," replied Rigou. "That priest isn't a man, he pays no attention to women; I can't see that he has any passion; there's no way to attack him. The general helps on whatever we do by his quick temper. A man who has a vice is always the servant of his enemies, when they know how to pull the string. There are no stronger men than those who guide their vices instead of allowing themselves to be guided by them. The peasants are all right, we keep our people always ready for action against the abbé, but we can't do anything against him yet. He's like Michaud; such men are too perfect, the good Lord ought to call them back to Him."

"We ought to provide them with servants who will soap their staircases well for them," said Madame Soudry, causing Rigou to give the slight start that in very cunning natures indicates the appreciation of cunning in others.

"The Upholsterer has another vice: he loves his wife, and we might attack him on that side."

"We must find out if he carries out his ideas," said Madame Soudry.

"What's that?" said Lupin, "why, that's just the difficulty!"

"Lupin," continued Rigou, in an authoritative tone, "you must go to the prefecture and see the fair Madame Sarcus, and go to-night! You must arrange matters so that she will make her husband tell her everything that the Upholsterer said and did at the prefecture."

"I shall be obliged to sleep there," said Lupin.

"So much the better for Sarcus the Rich, he'll be the gainer by it," observed Rigou. "Madame Sarcus isn't too much of a *croûte* yet."

"Oh! Monsieur Rigou," said Madame Soudry, with a pout, "are women ever *croûtes?*"

"You're right about her! She never paints in front of the mirror," retorted Rigou, who was always disgusted by the exhibition of La Cochet's aged treasures.

Madame Soudry, who believed that she used only a suspicion of rouge, did not understand that epigrammatic suggestion.

"Can women paint themselves?" she asked.

"As for you, Lupin," continued Rigou, allowing that ingenuous question to pass unheeded, "do you come back to Papa Gaubertin's to-morrow morning; tell him that my gossip and I," he said, smiting Soudry on the thigh, "will come and break a crust with him, ask him to give us some breakfast at noon. Post him as to matters in general, so that

we may all have had a chance to collect our ideas, for we must make an end of this damned Upholsterer. As I was coming here, I said to myself that we must involve him in a row with the court, so that the Keeper of the Seals will laugh in his face when he goes and asks him to change the personnel of the bench at Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Hurrah for the priests!" cried Lupin, patting Rigou's shoulder.

Madame Soudry was immediately struck by an idea which could occur to no one but the former lady's maid of an opera-singer.

"Suppose," she said, "we could entice the Upholsterer to the fête at Soulanges, and put some girl in his way who's pretty enough to turn his head; perhaps he would come to terms with her and then we would make trouble between him and his wife, and show her that a cabinet-maker's son always returns to his first love—"

"Ah! my dear," cried Soudry, "you have more wit in your single brain than the whole prefecture of police in Paris!"

"It's an idea which proves that madame is our queen in intelligence as well as in beauty," said Lupin.

Lupin was rewarded by a grimace which was accepted without protest as a smile by the first society of Soulanges.

"There's something better than that," said Rigou, after sitting for a long time lost in thought. "If it could be made a matter of public scandal—"

"Examination and complaint, a trial in the police-court," cried Lupin. "Oh! that would be too fine!"

"What bliss!" exclaimed Soudry, artlessly, "to see the Comte de Montcornet, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, Commander of Saint-Louis, and Lieutenant-general, accused of a criminal assault in a public place—"

"He's too fond of his wife!" said Lupin, judiciously; "we shall never lead him as far as that."

"That's no obstacle; but I can't think of any girl in the whole arrondissement capable of leading a saint into sin; I am looking for such a one for my abbé!" said Rigou.

"What do you say to pretty Gatienne Giboulard of Auxerre, whom young Sarcus is mad over?" queried Lupin.

"She's the only possible one," said Rigou, "but she isn't what we want for our purpose; she thinks she has only to show herself to be admired, she's too high and mighty, and what we must have is a sly, roguish creature.—Never mind, she'll turn up—"

"Yes," said Lupin, "the more pretty girls he sees, the more chances there will be."

"It will be very hard to induce the Upholsterer to come to the fair! And, even if he should come to the fête, would he go to such a dancing-place as our *Tivoli?*" said the ex-gendarme.

"The motive that might prevent his coming doesn't exist this year, my heart," said Madame Soudry.

"What motive is that, my love?" her husband asked.

"The Upholsterer wanted to marry Mademoiselle de Soulanges," said the notary. "He was told that she was too young and it vexed him. That is why Messieurs de Soulanges and de Montcornet, those two old friends, for they both served in the Garde Impériale, became so cool in their relations that they ceased to see each other. The Upholsterer has preferred not to meet the Soulanges at the fair; but this year they won't be there."

Ordinarily the Soulanges family lived at the château in July, August, September, and October; but the general was in command of the artillery in Spain at this time, under the Duc d'Angoulême, and the countess had accompanied him. At the siege of Cadiz, the Comte de Soulanges earned, as we know, a marshal's baton, which he received in 1826. Thus Montcornet's enemies might well believe that the people at Aigues would not continue to look down upon the fête of Notre-Dame in August, and that it would be an easy matter to entice them to *Tivoli*.

"That is true!" cried Lupin.—"Well, papa," he continued, addressing Rigou, "it's for you to work it so as to get him to come to the fair; and we'll find a way to trap him."

The fair of Soulanges, which is held on August 15th, is one of the peculiar features of the town, and surpasses all the fairs within a radius of thirty leagues, even those held at the capital of the

department. Ville-aux-Fayes has no fair, its fête, Saint-Sylvestre, occurring in winter.

From August 12th to 15th, tradespeople abound in Soulanges, and erect in two parallel lines those little wooden barracks, those houses of gray canvas which give an aspect of great animation to the usually deserted square. The fortnight that the fair and the fête last produces a sort of harvest for the little town of Soulanges. The fête has the prestige, the authority of a tradition. The peasants, as Père Fourchon said, leave their communes to which their daily labors ordinarily confine them. Throughout France the fantastic show-windows of the shops improvised on the market-places, the collection of merchandise of all sorts, of articles suited to the needs or to flatter the vanity of the peasants,—who have no other entertainments, by the way,—exert periodical seductions over the imagination of women and children. And so, from the 12th of August, the municipal authorities of Soulanges caused to be posted throughout the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes placards, signed by Soudry, promising protection to peddlers, merry-andrews, shows of all sorts, and announcing the duration of the fair and its most alluring attractions.

On the placards, concerning which we heard La Tonsard question Vermichel, was always to be seen this final line:

"*Tivoli* will be illuminated with colored lanterns."

The town had, in fact, selected as a place for holding the public ball Socquard's *Tivoli*, located in a

garden of the same stony soil as the hill on which Soulanges is built—almost all the gardens in the town being of made land.

The nature of the soil explains the peculiar taste of the wine of Soulanges, a dry, fruity, white wine, almost like Madeira, Johannisberg, and Vouvray wine, three similar vintages; it is all consumed in the department.

The prodigious effect produced by the Socquard ball on the imagination of the people of the valley made them all proud of their *Tivoli*. Those people of the province who had been as far as Paris said that the Paris *Tivoli* surpassed that at Soulanges only in size. Gaubertin, for his part, boldly expressed his preference for the Socquard ball over the other.

"We must think it all over," said Rigou. "The Parisian, that newspaper editor, will surely weary of his pleasure at last; and, from what the servants say, they can all be enticed to the fair. I will think it over. Sibilet, although his influence is decreasing like the devil, can hint to his bourgeois that it's a way to make himself popular."

"Pray ascertain whether the fair countess is cruel to monsieur; everything depends upon that so far as regards the trick to be played on him at *Tivoli*," said Lupin to Rigou.

"The little woman is too much of a Parisian," cried Madame Soudry, "not to know how to manage two strings to her bow at once."

"Fourchon has set his granddaughter Catherine on Charles, the Upholsterer's second footman; we

shall soon have an ear in the private apartments at Aigues," said Rigou. "Are you sure of Abbé Taupin?" he asked, as the abbé entered the room.

"We hold Abbé Moucheron and him as tight as I hold Soudry!" said Madame Soudry, patting her husband's chin, and saying to him: "Poor boy, you're not so very unlucky!"

"If I can get up a scandal against that hypocrite of a Brossette, I rely upon them!" said Rigou, in an undertone, as he rose from his chair; "but I don't know whether the locality spirit will prevail against the Church spirit. You don't know how strong that is. I, myself, who am no fool, won't answer for myself when I'm sick. I've no doubt I shall make my peace with the Church."

"Permit me to hope so," said the curé, for whose benefit Rigou had purposely raised his voice.

"Alas! the sin I committed in marrying prevents my doing so," he replied; "I cannot kill Madame Rigou."

"Meanwhile, let us think about Aigues," said Madame Soudry.

"True," replied the ex-Benedictine. "Do you know, I believe our friend at Ville-aux-Fayes is sharper than we are? I have an idea that Gaubertin wants Aigues all to himself, and that he'll trick us," he added.

On his way thither the country usurer had struck his staff of prudence on certain dark spots in Gaubertin's behavior which gave forth a hollow sound.

"But Aigues is not to belong to any one of us

three; it must be demolished from top to bottom!" cried Soudry.

"Especially, as I shouldn't wonder if we should find gold hidden there," hinted Rigou, cunningly.

"Bah!"

"Yes, during the wars of long ago, the nobles, who were often besieged and surprised, buried their treasure so as to be able to find it again; and you know that the Marquis de Soulanges-Hautemer, in whose person the younger branch came to an end, was one of the victims of the Biron conspiracy. The Comtesse de Moret got the land by confiscation."

"That's what it is to know the history of France!" said the gendarme. "You are right, it's time to come to an agreement with Gaubertin."

"And if he shuffles," said Rigou, "we'll find a way to *smoke* him out."

"He's rich enough now to be an honest man," said Lupin.

"I would answer for him as for myself," said Madame Soudry; "he's the honestest man in the kingdom."

"We believe in his honesty," rejoined Rigou; "but we mustn't neglect any precautions among friends. By the way, I suspect someone at Soulanges of trying to interfere."

"Who?" asked Soudry.

"Plissoud!"

"Plissoud!" cried Soudry, "the poor jade! Brunet holds him by the halter, and his wife by the crib; ask Lupin!"

"What can he do?" said Lupin.

"He means to tell Montcornet what is going on," Rigou replied, "to obtain his patronage, and obtain a place for himself."

"That will never bring him in so much as his wife at Soulanges does," said Madame Soudry.

"He tells his wife everything when he's drunk," observed Lupin; "we should know it in time."

"The fair Madame Plissoud has no secrets from you," Rigou replied; "so we needn't worry."

"She's as silly as she is pretty," said Madame Soudry; "I wouldn't change with her; for, if I was a man, I'd prefer an ugly woman who knows something to a pretty one who can't say two words."

"Ah!" rejoined the notary, biting his lips, "she can make other people say three."

"Puppy!" cried Rigou, walking toward the door.

"Well," said Soudry, showing out his associate, "until to-morrow, early."

"I will come and get you.—By the way, Lupin," he said to the notary, who went out with him to order his horse saddled, "try to have Madame Sarcus find out all the steps that our Upholsterer takes against us at the prefecture."

"If she can't find it out, who can?" replied Lupin.

"I beg your pardon," said Rigou, smiling slyly, as he glanced at Lupin; "I saw so many idiots in there that I forgot there was one bright man among them."

"Really, I don't see why I haven't grown rusty," rejoined Lupin, artlessly.

"Is it true that Soudry has a servant-girl?"

"Why, yes," replied Lupin; "about a week ago monsieur le maire determined to set his wife's charms in bold relief by comparing her to a little Burgundian girl of the age of an old ox, and we can't imagine yet how he's going to arrange matters with Madame Soudry, for he has the audacity to go to bed very early."

"We'll see about that to-morrow," said the village Sardanapalus, trying to smile.

The two crafty politicians exchanged a grasp of the hand as they parted.

Rigou, who preferred not to be on the road after dark,—for, despite his newly-acquired popularity, he was always prudent,—said to his horse: "Go on, citizen!" a jest which that child of 1793 constantly let fly at the Revolution. Popular revolutions have no more cruel enemies than those they rear themselves.

"Père Rigou doesn't make long calls," said Gourdon the clerk to Madame Soudry.

"They are pleasant if they are short," she replied.

"Like his life," observed the doctor; "that man abuses everything."

"So much the better," said Soudry; "my son will enjoy his property all the sooner."

"Did he give you any news from Aigues?" inquired the curé.

"Yes, my dear abbé," said Madame Soudry. "Those people are the scourge of this neighborhood. I can't understand why Madame de Montcornet, who's a woman *comme il faut*, hasn't a better appreciation of her own interests."

"They have a model right before their eyes, too," replied the curé.

"Who, pray?" asked Madame Soudry, affectedly.

"The Soulanges."

"Oh! yes," said the queen, after a pause.

"Here I am, more's the pity!" cried Madame Vermut, entering the room, "and without my *reactive*, for Vermut is too *inactive* in what concerns me, for me to call him an *active* of any sort."

"What the devil is that infernal Père Rigou doing?" said Soudry to Guerbet, noticing that the carriole had halted at the door of *Tivoli*. "He's one of the tiger-cats that never take a step without some object."

"Infernal's the word for him!" observed the fat little collector.

"He's going into the Café de la Paix!" said Doctor Gourdon.

"Never fear," added Gourdon the clerk; "he's giving his blessing with closed fists, for you can hear them yelping from here."

"That café," observed the curé, "is like the temple of Janus: it was called the Café de la Guerre under the Empire, and then everything was perfectly peaceful there; the most honorable citizens assembled there to converse in a friendly way—"

"He calls that *conversing!*" said the justice of the peace. "*Tudieu!* such conversations as those that resulted in the little Bourniers!"

"But since they dubbed it Café de la Paix in honor of the Bourbons, there's fighting there every day," said Abbé Taupin, finishing the sentence which the justice of the peace had made free to interrupt.

It was the same with that idea of the curé's as with the quotations from the *Bilboquéide*, it kept cropping out.

"That is to say," said Père Guerbet, "that Bourgogne will always be the province of fisticuffs—"

"That remark of yours isn't so far from the truth," said the curé; "it's almost the whole history of our country."

"I don't know the history of France," cried Soudry; "but, before I learn it, I would like well to know why my gossip is going into the café with Socquard?"

"Oh! if he goes in and stays there," said the curé, "you may be perfectly sure that it has nothing to do with acts of charity."

"He's a man who makes my flesh creep whenever I see him," said Madame Vermut.

"He is so to be feared," rejoined the physician, "that, if he had a grudge against me, I shouldn't feel easy even after he was dead; he's a man to rise from the grave to play some low trick on you."

"If anyone can send the Upholsterer to us here on August 15th and catch him in some trap, Rigou's the man," the mayor whispered in his wife's ear.

"Especially," she replied aloud, "if Gaubertin and you, my heart, take a hand in it."

"Look! what did I tell you?" cried Guerbet, nudging Sarcus's elbow; "he has found some pretty girl at Socquard's, and he's putting her into his carriage—"

"And meanwhile—" said the clerk.

"There's a remark entirely free from malice," cried Monsieur Guerbet, interrupting the sweet singer of the *Bilboquéide*.

"You are wrong, gentlemen," said Madame Soudry. "Monsieur Rigou is thinking only of our interests; for, if I am not mistaken, that girl is one of Tonsard's daughters."

"He's like the druggist who lays in a stock of venomous snakes," cried Père Guerbet.

"One would say," observed Doctor Gourdon, "that you had seen our druggist, Monsieur Vermut, from your way of speaking."

And he pointed to the little Soulanges apothecary who was crossing the square.

"Poor fellow," said the clerk, who was suspected of exchanging ideas frequently with Madame Vermut, "just see what a gait he has!—And he's supposed to be a scholar!"

"If it weren't for him," said the justice of the peace, "we should be at a loss in the matter of autopsies; he was so successful in finding the poison in poor Pigeron's body, that the chemists from Paris said at the assizes at Auxerre that they couldn't have done better."

"He found nothing at all," retorted Soudry; "but, as President Gendrin says, it's just as well that people should believe that poison's always discovered."

"Madame Pigeron did well to leave Auxerre!" said Madame Vermut. "That woman doesn't know anything, and she's a great villain," she added. "Ought one to have recourse to drugs to put a husband out of the way? Haven't we plenty of sure, but innocent, means of getting rid of that sort of creature? I'd like to see the man that would find a word to say against my conduct! Monsieur Vermut doesn't trouble me much, and he's none the worse off for that; and Madame de Montcornet, see how she parades around in her chalets and her summer-houses with that journalist that she had come down from Paris at her expense, and coddles before the general's face!"

"At her expense?" cried Madame Soudry, "are you sure of that? If we could get proof of it, what a charming text for an anonymous letter to the general!"

"The general," rejoined Madame Vermut; "why, you won't interfere with her at all in that way; the Upholsterer's carrying on his trade."

"What trade, my dear?" queried Madame Soudry.

"Why, he furnishes the bed."

"If poor little Pigeron, instead of annoying his wife, had been wise enough to do that, he would be alive still," said the clerk.

Madame Soudry leaned over to her neighbor, Monsieur Guerbet of Conches; she bestowed upon him

one of the monkey-like grimaces which she fancied that she had inherited from her former mistress, as she had her silver plate, by right of conquest, and, doubling the usual dose, she pointed to Madame Vermut, who was flirting with the author of the *Bilboquéide*, and said to the postmaster:

"What wretched form that woman has! what remarks and what manners! I don't know whether I can admit her *to our society* any longer, especially when Monsieur Gourdon, the poet, is present."

"There's your social morality!" remarked the curé, who had watched and listened without speaking.

Upon that epigram, or, rather, that satire upon society, so concise and so true that it touched everyone, somebody suggested the usual game of boston.

Is not this a true picture of life as we find it at all stages of what we have agreed to call society? Change the names, and nothing more or less is said in the most luxurious salons in Paris.

III

THE CAFÉ DE LA PAIX

It was about seven o'clock when Rigou drove by the Café de la Paix. The setting sun, which threw a girdle about the pretty little town, was displaying at that moment his most gorgeous hues, and the transparent mirror of the waters of the lake was contrasted with the riotous splendor of the flaming window-panes, which exhibited the most extraordinary and inconceivable combinations of color.

The profound schemer, absorbed in his plots and thinking deeply, allowed his horse to go so slowly that, as he passed the café, his ear caught his own name, uttered in one of the constant disputes which, according to the observation of Taupin the curé, caused a most violent contradiction between the name of that establishment and its features.

In order that the ensuing scene may be understood, it is necessary to explain the topography of that land of pure delight, bounded by the café itself on the square and on the cantonal road by the famous *Tivoli*, which the plotters had selected as the stage for one of the scenes in the conspiracy long since formed against General de Montcornet.

By virtue of its location at the junction of the square and the road, the ground-floor of the house, built in the same style as Rigou's, with three windows on the road, had two windows on the square and between them the glass door through which you entered the house. The café also had a side-door, opening on a passage-way which separated it from the next house, that of Vallet, the Soulanges mercer, and which led to an inner courtyard.

The house, painted a golden yellow throughout, except the shutters, which were green, was one of the few houses in the little town which had two floors and an attic. This is the reason.

Before the amazing prosperity of Ville-aux-Fayes, the first floor of the house, containing four rooms, each of which was provided with a bed and the small amount of furniture necessary to justify the word *furnished*, was let to persons who were compelled to come to Soulanges on business connected with the court, or to visitors who could not be accommodated at the château; but for the past twenty-five years those furnished rooms had had no other tenants than mountebanks, travelling peddlers, hawkers of medicines, or commercial travellers. At the time of the fête at Soulanges, the rooms were let at four francs a day. Socquard's four rooms brought him something like three hundred francs a year, without counting the extra food and drink consumed by his lodgers in the café.

The front on the square was embellished with special paintings. In the pictures between the

windows and the door were billiard cues amorously tied together by ribbons; and above the ribbons were Greek cups filled with steaming punch. The words *Café de la Paix* shone resplendent in yellow letters on a green ground, flanked by pyramids of tricolored balls. The windows, the frames of which were painted green, had small panes of common window-glass.

A dozen or more arbor-vitæ trees, which should be called café-trees, stood in tubs at the right and left of the door, displaying their sickly but pretentious verdure. The awnings with which shopkeepers in Paris and some wealthy cities protect their shops from the sun's heat were at this time a luxury unknown in Soulanges. The phials displayed on shelves behind the glass panes were the more deserving of their name in that the beneficent liquors they contained underwent periodical boilings there. The sun, concentrating its rays on the lens-like knobs in the glass, set the Madeira boiling, and the syrups, the liqueurs, the bottles of brandied plums and cherries in the show-cases; for the heat was so great that Aglaé, her father, and their waiter were compelled to sit on benches on each side of the door, inadequately sheltered by the wretched shrubs which Mademoiselle Socquard watered with water that was almost hot. On certain days all three of them, father, daughter, and servant, could be seen stretched out there, sound asleep, like domestic animals.

In 1804, when *Paul et Virginie* was in vogue, the

interior of the establishment was hung with a varnished paper representing the principal scenes of that romance. Negroes were seen harvesting the coffee, which was at least found somewhere in the house, where not twenty cups of coffee a month were consumed. Colonial products cut so small a figure in Soulanges habits, that if a stranger had asked for a cup of chocolate he would have embarrassed Père Socquard sadly; but he would have obtained the nauseous brown compound produced by the cakes sold at two sous by village grocers and manufactured with the design of ruining the trade in that Spanish product—cakes which contain more flour, pounded almonds, and unrefined sugar than chocolate.

As for the coffee, Père Socquard simply boiled it in a vessel known in all households by the name of the *great brown kettle;* he allowed the powder, in which there was a plentiful admixture of chicory, to settle, and served the decoction, with a dignity worthy of a waiter in a Paris café, in a China cup, which would not have cracked if you had thrown it on the ground.

At the time of which we write, the veneration with which sugar was regarded under the Emperor had not altogether disappeared in the town of Soulanges, and Aglaé Socquard bravely carried four lumps as big as hazel-nuts, in addition to a cup of coffee, to an itinerant peddler who had rashly called for that literary beverage.

The interior decoration, lightened by mirrors in

gilt frames and brackets to hang hats on, had not been changed since the days when all Soulanges flocked to admire those marvellous hangings, and a counter painted to imitate mahogany with a top of Saint-Anne marble, whereon were plated urns and lamps with a double draught, said to have been presented by Gaubertin to the fair Madame Socquard. The surface of everything was covered with a layer of sticky dirt, comparable only to that with which old pictures are covered that lie neglected in lumber-rooms.

Tables painted to look like marble, stools covered with red Utrecht velvet, the Argand lamp with a globe filled with oil from which two burners were fed, hanging by a chain from the ceiling and decked out with glass pendants, inaugurated the renown of the Café de la Paix.

There, from 1802 to 1804, all the good bourgeois of Soulanges resorted to play at dominoes and *brelan*, sipping *petits verres* of liqueur or mulled wine, nibbling at brandied fruits and biscuits; for the high price of colonial produce had banished coffee, chocolate, and sugar. Punch was the great delicacy, and the *bavaroises*. These last-named preparations were made with a sweet, syrupy substance, like molasses, the name of which is now lost, but which made the inventor's fortune at the time.

These concise details will bring back analogous establishments to the memory of travellers; and they who have never left Paris will be able to imagine the smoke-blackened ceiling of the Café de la Paix

and its mirrors marred by myriads of black spots, which proved the unfettered life led by winged insects there.

The fair Madame Socquard, whose experiences in the line of gallantry surpassed those of La Tonsard of the *Grand-I-Vert*, set up her throne there, dressed in the latest fashion; she affected the sultana turban. The *sultana* enjoyed the popularity under the Empire that the *angel* enjoys to-day.

The whole valley used to go thither to study the turbans, the peaked bonnets, the fur-lined caps, the Chinese head-dresses of the lovely *cafetière*, to whose luxurious attire all the leading lights of Soulanges contributed. With her girdle about the solar plexus, as it was worn by our mothers who were so proud of their imperial charms, Junie—her name was Junie!—created the Socquard establishment; her husband owed to her the possession of a vineyard, the house he lived in, and *Tivoli*. Monsieur Lupin's father had made a fool of himself, it was said, for pretty Junie Socquard; Gaubertin, who had taken her from him, certainly owed little Bournier to her.

These details and the secret receipt by which Père Socquard brewed mulled wine would sufficiently explain the popularity of his name and of the Café de la Paix; but there were many other considerations which added to it. One could obtain nothing but wine at Tonsard's and at all the other wine-shops in the valley; while, from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes, within a circumference of six leagues, Socquard's café was the only place where you could play billiards

and drink the punch which the proprietor brewed so skilfully. There only were displayed foreign wines, fine liqueurs, and brandied fruits.

His name therefore rang through the valley almost every day, accompanied with the ideas of supreme bliss which fill the minds of those whose stomachs are more sensitive than their hearts. To these causes was added the privilege of forming an integral part of the fête of Soulanges. In a word, the Café de la Paix was to the town, in the next higher grade, what the *Grand-I-Vert* was to the country regions, a storehouse of poison, it served as a way-station for gossip between Ville-aux-Fayes and the valley. The *Grand-I-Vert* supplied the Café de la Paix with milk and cream, and Tonsard's two daughters were in daily communication with the establishment.

To Socquard's mind the square at Soulanges was an appendage to his café. The Hercules went from door to door, talking with everybody, wearing in summer no clothing save a pair of trousers and a waistcoat always unbuttoned, according to the custom of café proprietors in small towns. He was notified by the person with whom he was talking if anyone went into his place, when he would return with heavy step and apparently with regret!

These details should convince Parisians who have never left their quarter, of the difficulty, let us say rather the impossibility, of keeping the slightest thing secret in the valley of the Avonne, from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes. In the country districts there is no *solution of continuity;* there are, at intervals,

such places as the wine-shop of *Grand-I-Vert* and the Café de la Paix, which perform the functions of echoes, and where the most unimportant acts, performed in the utmost secrecy, reverberate by a sort of magic. Social gossip fulfils the office of the electric telegraph; this is the explanation of the miracles performed in the way of obtaining news in the twinkling of an eye, of disasters that have happened at a great distance.

Having stopped, Rigou alighted from his carriole and fastened the rein to one of the gate-posts of *Tivoli*. Thus he had the most natural of pretexts for listening to the discussion without seeming to do so, by placing himself between two windows, through one of which he could, by putting out his head, see the persons inside and observe their gestures, meanwhile losing none of the loud talk which beat against the window-panes; and which the perfect quiet without enabled him to hear.

"And suppose I should tell Père Rigou that your brother Nicolas is after La Péchina," cried a sharp voice, "that he's always watching her and that she'll slip away under your lord and master's nose,—he'd soon rip out the entrails of everyone of you pack of beggars at the *Grand-I-Vert!*"

"If you should play us such a trick, Aglaé," retorted Marie Tonsard's shrill voice, "you wouldn't tell what I'd do to you to anybody but the worms in your coffin! Don't you meddle in Nicolas's business, nor in mine and Bonnébault's either!"

Marie, incited by her grandmother, had followed

Bonnébault, as we see; watching him through the very window at which Rigou was standing at that moment, she had seen him exerting his fascinations and making such agreeably flattering remarks to Mademoiselle Socquard that she deemed herself bound to smile upon him. That smile had led to the scene in the midst of which occurred the above passage, revealing a fact of great importance to Rigou.

"Well, well, Père Rigou, you're injuring my property!" said Socquard, bringing his hand down on the usurer's shoulder.

The proprietor of the café, coming from a barn at the end of the garden from which the apparatus for divers public games, such as weighing-machines, merry-go-rounds, dangerous seesaws, etc., were being removed, preparatory to being set up in the places they occupied in his *Tivoli*, had approached without noise, for he wore the yellow leather slippers whose low price causes large numbers of them to be sold in the provinces.

"If you have any fresh lemons, I'll have a lemonade; it's a hot night," said Rigou.

"Hello! what's all this snarling?" said Socquard, looking through the window and seeing his daughter at daggers drawn with Marie.

"They're fighting over Bonnébault," said Rigou, with a sardonic leer.

The father's wrath was held in check in Socquard by the selfish interest of the proprietor of the café. In the latter capacity, he deemed it prudent to listen

outside as Rigou was doing; while the father longed to enter and announce that Bonnébault, although overflowing with qualities that were most estimable in the eyes of a cafetier, had nothing to recommend him for son-in-law of one of the notabilities of Soulanges. And yet Père Socquard received few proposals for his daughter's hand. At twenty-two, she was a close competitor, in breadth, thickness, and weight, of Madame Vermichel, whose activity seemed phenomenal. The custom of sitting behind a counter increased the tendency to corpulence which Aglaé owed to her father's blood.

"What devil has got into those girls?" said Père Socquard to Rigou.

"Ah! it's the very one of all the devils that the Church seizes most frequently," replied the ex-Benedictine.

Socquard made no reply, but began to study the billiard cues in the pictures between the windows, which were somewhat hard to make out because there were spots where the mortar had been peeled away by the hand of time.

At that moment, Bonnébault emerged from the billiard-room, cue in hand, and said to Marie, striking her roughly:

"You made me miss my shot; but I won't miss you, and I'll keep on hitting you till you put a mute on your bell."

Socquard and Rigou, thinking that it was time to interfere, entered the café from the square, and stirred up such a swarm of flies that the light was

obscured. The noise resembled that of the exercises at the drumming-school, heard at a distance. After the first surprise, the great blue-bellied flies, attended by some murderous smaller ones and a few horse-flies, returned to their places in the window, where, upon three rows of shelves, the paint upon which had entirely disappeared under their black specks, could be seen viscous bottles, drawn up in line like soldiers.

Marie was weeping. To be struck in her rival's presence by the object of their rivalry is one of those humiliations no woman can endure, on whatever rung of the social ladder she may stand; and the lower down she is, the more violent is the expression of her hatred; so it was that the Tonsard girl saw neither Rigou nor Socquard; she sank on a stool, in gloomy, savage silence, which the ex-monk noticed.

"Go and get a fresh lemon, Aglaé," said Père Socquard, "and rinse out a glass yourself."

"You were very prudent to send your daughter away," said Rigou, in an undertone, to Socquard; "she might have got a mortal wound."

And he glanced significantly at the hand with which Marie was grasping a stool, which she had seized to throw at Aglaé, whom she was watching closely.

"Look you, Marie," said Père Socquard, taking his stand in front of her, "people don't come here to throw stools,—and if you should smash my mirrors, you couldn't pay for them with the milk your cows give."

"Your daughter's a dirty snake, Père Socquard, and I'm as good as she is, don't you doubt it! If you don't want Bonnébault for a son-in-law, it's time to go somewhere else to play billiards!—here he's losing a hundred sous a minute—"

At the beginning of this flood of words, shrieked rather than spoken, Socquard took Marie around the waist and threw her out-of-doors, despite her cries and her struggles. It was just in time for her, as Bonnébault appeared again with fire in his eye.

"You haven't heard the last of this!" cried Marie.

"Clear out!" roared Bonnébault, while Viollet held him around the body to prevent him from doing some brutal thing; "go to the devil, or I'll never speak to you or look at you again."

"You?" said Marie, glaring fiercely at him. "Give me back my money first, and then I'll let Mademoiselle Socquard have you, if she's rich enough to keep you."

Thereupon, Marie, terrified to see that Hercules Socquard could hardly hold Bonnébault, who was fighting like a tiger, ran off down the road.

Rigou put her into his carriole to rescue her from the wrath of Bonnébault, whose voice could be heard as far as the Soudry house; then, after concealing her, he returned to drink his lemonade, scrutinizing a group composed of Plissoud, Amaury, Viollet, and the café waiter, who were trying to calm Bonnébault.

"Come, it's your play, hussar!" said Amaury, a short, fair-haired youth with a restless eye.

RIGOU AND MARIE TONSARD

"I'll set you down at the entrance to the village," said Rigou, when he saw the first houses of Blangy.

"On account of Annette, you old coward!" cried Marie. "You'll be sending her away soon, won't you? You've had her three years now!"

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"At all events, she's cleared out," said Viollet.

If any human being ever exhibited surprise, it was Plissoud when he spied the money-lender of Blangy seated at one of the tables, and more engrossed by him, Plissoud, than by the dispute between the two girls. Do what he would, the bailiff could not prevent his features from betraying the shock caused by a chance meeting with a man to whom you bear ill-will or whom you are plotting against, and he returned abruptly to the billiard-room.

"Farewell, Père Socquard," said the usurer.

"I'll bring up your carriage," said the host; "take your time."

"How shall I manage to find out what those fellows are saying over their game of pool?" said Rigou to himself, noticing the waiter's face in the mirror.

The waiter was a Jack-of-all-trades: he tended Socquard's vines, he swept the café and billiard-room, he kept the garden in order and watered *Tivoli*, all for sixty francs a year. He was always without a jacket, except on great occasions, and his entire costume consisted of blue cotton trousers, heavy shoes, and a striped velvet waistcoat, over which he wore a homespun apron when he was on duty in the billiard-room or the café. That apron, tied with strings, was the insignia of his office. The fellow had been hired by Socquard at the last fair; for, in that valley, as in all Bourgogne, servants are hired in the market-place for the year, exactly as horses are sold.

"What's your name?" said Rigou.

"Michel, at your service," the man replied.

"Don't you sometimes see Père Fourchon here?"

"Two or three times a week, with Monsieur Vermichel, who gives me a few sous to warn him when his wife's coming after 'em."

"He's a fine fellow, is Père Fourchon, well-informed and full of common sense," said Rigou, who paid for his lemonade and left the evil-smelling café as he saw Père Socquard leading his carriole to the door.

As he was about to enter the vehicle, Rigou spied the druggist and hailed him with an—"I say, Monsieur Vermut!" Vermut quickened his step as he recognized the rich man; Rigou walked to meet him, and said in his ear:

"Do you suppose there are such things as acids that will eat into the cellular tissue so as to produce a real disease, like a whitlow on the finger?"

"Yes, if Monsieur Gourdon will help," replied the little scientist.

"Vermut, not a word about this, or we shall have a falling-out; but mention it to Monsieur Gourdon and tell him to come to see me the day after to-morrow; I will give him a chance to perform the delicate operation of cutting off a forefinger."

Thereupon the ex-mayor, leaving the little druggist in open-mouthed astonishment, took his place in his carriole by Marie Tonsard's side.

"Well, little viper," said he, taking her by the arm when he had fastened the reins to a ring on the front

side of the leather apron that closed the carriole, and the horse had struck his regular gait, "do you think that you can keep Bonnébault by flying into such fits of passion? If you were wise, you'd help along his marriage with that great mountain of nonsense, and then you could have your revenge."

Marie could not help smiling as she replied:

"Oh! how wicked you are! you're the master of us all!"

"Look you, Marie, I like the peasants, but you must none of you get between my teeth and a mouthful of game.—Your brother Nicolas, as Aglaé said, is after La Péchina. That's not wise of him, for the child is under my protection; she'll be my heir to the tune of thirty thousand francs, and I mean to find a good husband for her. I have found out that Nicolas, with the help of your sister Catherine, nearly killed the poor little thing this morning; you must see your brother and sister and say to them: 'If you leave La Péchina in peace, Père Rigou will save Nicolas from the conscription.'"

"You're the very devil himself," cried Marie; "they say you've signed a contract with him.—Is it possible?"

"Yes," said Rigou, gravely.

"They used to tell us so to frighten us, but I didn't believe it."

"He has guaranteed that no attack made on me shall injure me, that I shall never be robbed, that I shall live a hundred years without any sickness, that I shall succeed in everything I undertake, and that,

up to the hour of my death, I shall be as young as a two-year-old rooster."

"Anybody can see that," said Marie. "Well, then, it's *devilish* easy for you to save my brother from the conscription—"

"If he chooses, for he must leave a finger behind him, that's all," said Rigou; "I'll tell him how."

"Say, are you going by the upper road?" said Marie.

"I don't drive through here after dark," replied the ex-monk.

"On account of the cross?" queried Marie, innocently.

"That's just it, minx!" replied the diabolical personage.

They had reached a spot where the cantonal road is cut through a slight elevation, so that it runs between two steep banks, such as we see so frequently on the roads of France.

At the end of this gorge, which is about a hundred yards long, the roads from Ronquerolles and Cerneux come together at a point marked by a cross. From either bank a man can draw a bead on anyone passing on the road, and shoot him down almost point-blank, and with the more security because, the eminence being covered with vines, a malefactor has every opportunity to lie in ambush among the bramble bushes that are scattered among them. We can see why the usurer, always prudent, never drove through there at night. The Thune skirts the little hill, which is called the Close of the Cross. Never

was a more favorable spot to wreak vengeance or commit murder, for the road from Ronquerolles leads to the high bridge over the Avonne in front of the gate-house built for a hunting-box, and the road from Cerneux runs on to the main road, so that the murderer can take his choice between the four roads leading to Aigues, Ville-aux-Fayes, Ronquerolles, or Cerneux, and puzzle those who undertake to pursue him.

"I'll set you down at the entrance to the village," said Rigou, when he saw the first houses of Blangy.

"On account of Annette, you old coward!" cried Marie. "You'll be sending her away soon, won't you? You've had her three years now! What amuses me is that your old woman keeps well all the time. The good Lord is having his revenge!"

IV

THE TRIUMVIRATE OF VILLE-AUX-FAYES

The prudent usurer compelled his wife and Jean to go to bed before dark and rise at dawn, convincing them that the house would never be attacked if he sat up till midnight and rose late. Not only had he made sure of being left in peace between seven o'clock at night and five in the morning, but he had accustomed his wife and Jean to respect his slumbers and those of the Hagar, whose room was situated behind his.

The next morning, about half-past six, Madame Rigou, who shared with Jean the care of the poultry-yard, knocked timidly at the door of her husband's chamber.

"Monsieur Rigou," she said, "you told me to wake you."

The tone of the woman's voice, her attitude, her shrinking way of obeying an order, the execution of which might be ill-received, indicated the utter self-effacement of the poor creature's life and her affection for the crafty tyrant.

"All right!" cried Rigou.

"Shall I wake Annette?" she asked.

"No, let her sleep! She's been up all night!" he replied, gravely.

The man was always grave even when he indulged in a jest. Annette had, in fact, opened the door secretly for Sibilet, Fourchon, and Catherine Tonsard, who had come at different times between eleven o'clock and one.

Ten minutes later, Rigou made his appearance, dressed with greater care than usual, and greeted his wife with a "Bonjour, old lady!" which made her happier than if she had seen General de Montcornet at her feet.

"Jean," he said to the ex-lay-brother, "don't leave the house, don't let anything be stolen, for you would lose more than I should."

It was by mingling mildness and harshness, hopes and rebuffs, that this cunning egotist had made his three slaves as faithful and as deeply attached as dogs.

Rigou, taking the upper road once more, to avoid the Close of the Cross, arrived on the square at Soulanges about eight o'clock.

Just as he was tying his rein to the turnstile nearest the little door with three steps, the shutter was thrown open. Soudry put forth his pock-marked face, to which two small black eyes gave a crafty expression.

"Let's begin by taking a bite, for we sha'n't breakfast at Ville-aux-Fayes before one o'clock."

He called softly to a maid-servant, as young and pretty as Rigou's, who came noiselessly downstairs,

and whom he ordered to bring a bit of ham and some bread; then he went himself to the cellar for wine.

For the thousandth time Rigou gazed about that dining-room, floored with oak, with moulded panels on the ceiling, supplied with artistically painted cupboards, with a wooden wainscoting, waist-high, and embellished with a porcelain stove and a magnificent clock, inherited from Madame Laguerre. The chair-backs were in the shape of lyres, the wood-work painted white and varnished, the seat upholstered in green morocco with gilt nails. The solid mahogany table was covered with green oil-cloth with large dark squares, and with a border of green. The floor, laid in *point de Hongrie*, was carefully scrubbed by Urbain, and showed what care ex-lady's maids require from their servants.

"Bah! all this costs too much," said Rigou to himself. "One can eat as comfortably in my dining-room as in this one, and I have the income of the money that I should have to spend to procure all this useless splendor.—Where is Madame Soudry, pray?" he asked the mayor of Soulanges, as he appeared armed with a venerable bottle.

"She's asleep."

"And you don't often disturb her sleep now," said Rigou.

The ex-gendarme winked with a roguish air and pointed to the ham which Jeannette, his pretty servant, brought in at that moment.

"A slice off a handsome joint like that will wake

you up," he said; "it was cured in the house! I cut it yesterday."

"I didn't know you had anything like that in your house, my friend. Where did you fish her up?" said the ex-Benedictine in Soudry's ear.

"She's like the ham," replied the mayor, beginning to wink again; "I've had her a week."

Jeannette, still in her nightcap and short petticoat, with slippers on her bare feet, had slipped on a waist made with straps over the shoulders, according to the peasant fashion, over which she wore a silk handkerchief with the ends crossed, which did not entirely conceal her fresh and youthful charms; her appearance was no less appetizing than that of the ham so vaunted by Soudry. She was short and plump, with bare arms mottled with red, and fat, dimpled hands, with short fingers, well-shaped at the end, indicating robust health. She had the genuine Burgundian face, ruddy, but white about the temples, neck, and ears; chestnut hair, the corner of the eye turned up toward the top of the ear, open nostrils, a sensual mouth, a little down along the edge of the cheeks; and a lively expression, tempered by a deceitfully modest manner, which made her the model of a wanton maid-servant.

"Upon my word, Jeannette resembles a ham," said Rigou. "If I hadn't an Annette, I would like a Jeannette."

"One's as good as the other," said the ex-gendarme, "for your Annette is fair and sweet and dainty.—How's Madame Rigou?—is she asleep?—"

he asked abruptly, to show Rigou that he understood the jest.

"She woke up with our rooster," Rigou replied; "but she goes to bed with the hens. But I sit up to read the *Constitutionnel*. Night and morning my wife lets me sleep; she wouldn't come into my room for the world."

"It's just the other way here," interposed Jeannette. "Madame sits up and plays cards with the people from the town; sometimes there's fifteen of 'em in the salon; monsieur goes to bed at eight o'clock, and we get up at sunrise—"

"That may seem different to you," said Rigou, "but it's the same thing in reality. Well, my pretty child, come to my house and I'll send Annette here; it will be the same thing and yet it will be different."

"You old rascal," said Soudry, "you put her to shame."

"What's that, gendarme? you don't want but one horse in your stable, do you? However, everyone takes his luck where he finds it."

Jeannette, at a word from her master, went away to prepare his clothes.

"You've promised to marry her at your wife's death, I suppose?" queried Rigou.

"At our ages, that's the only means we have left," replied the gendarme.

"With ambitious girls, that would be a way of becoming a widower at short notice," said Rigou, "especially if Madame Soudry should mention her method of soaping staircases in Jeannette's presence."

That remark made the two husbands pensive. When Jeannette came to announce that everything was ready, Soudry said to her: "Come and help me!" whereat the ex-Benedictine smiled.

"There's another difference," he said; "for my part, I would leave you with Annette without any fear, my friend."

A quarter of an hour later, Soudry, dressed in his Sunday best, entered the wicker carriole, and the friends skirted the lake of Soulanges on their way to Ville-aux-Fayes.

"How about yonder château?" said Rigou, when they reached a spot from which they obtained a side view of the château.

The old revolutionist asked the question in a tone that betrayed the hatred cherished by country bourgeois for great châteaux and great estates.

"Why, I hope to see it stand as long as I live," replied the former gendarme. "The Comte de Soulanges was my general; he did me a favor; he arranged my pension for me very satisfactorily, and then he leaves the management of his estate to Lupin, whose father made his fortune there. After Lupin, someone else will have the place, and so long as there are Soulanges, the château will be respected. Those people are good stock, they let everyone have a chance and they're better off for it."

"Ah! but the general has three children who won't be so obliging, perhaps, after his death; some day or other his sons and his daughter's husband will quarrel and obtain leave to sell this mine of lead

and iron to dealers in property from whom we can find a way to get them back."

The château of Soulanges appeared as if to defy the unfrocked monk.

"Ah! they built well in those days!" cried Soudry. "But Monsieur le Comte is saving up his income now so as to make of Soulanges the *majorat* for his peerage."

"My friend," rejoined Rigou, "*majorats* will soon be things of the past."

When the chapter of public affairs was once exhausted, the two bourgeois began to discuss the merits of their respective maid-servants in patois a little too Burgundian to be printed. That inexhaustible subject carried them so far, that they were still talking when they came in sight of the metropolis of the arrondissement, where Gaubertin reigned—a place concerning which it may be that sufficient curiosity has been aroused to induce the most hurried reader to permit a short digression.

The name Ville-aux-Fayes, although it has a strange sound, is readily explained by the corruption of its original—in low Latin *villa in fago*, the manor in the woods. That name tells us at once that formerly a forest covered the delta formed by the Avonne and its confluent the Yonne, which joins it five leagues below. Doubtless a Frank built a fortress on the hill which at that point begins to fall gently away to the long plain where Leclercq, the deputy, had purchased his estate. By cutting off the delta by means of a long, deep moat, the conqueror made

for himself a formidable position, a stronghold essentially seignorial, conveniently situated for the collection of tolls on the bridges required by the high-roads, and for compelling payment of the miller's fee on all grain ground in the mills.

Such is the history of the beginnings of Ville-aux-Fayes. Wherever feudal or religious domination was established, it engendered property rights, inhabitants, and eventually towns, when the different localities found themselves in a position to attract and develop or to found manufacturing industries. The process invented by Jean Rouvet for floating logs, which necessitated suitable places to intercept them, created Ville-aux-Fayes, which, prior to that time, was only a village compared to Soulanges. Ville-aux-Fayes became the depot for the timber which lined the two streams for twelve leagues. The work required for taking the logs from the water, the identification of *lost* logs, and the manufacture of the rafts that the Yonne carries down to the Seine, called together a great number of workmen. The population increased consumption and stimulated trade. Thus Ville-aux-Fayes, which did not contain six hundred inhabitants at the end of the sixteenth century, contained two thousand in 1790, and Gaubertin had increased the number to four thousand. This is how he had done it:

When the Legislative Assembly ordered the new division of French territory, Ville-aux-Fayes, which was at the requisite distance from Paris for the creation of a sub-prefecture, was selected, in preference

to Soulanges, for chief town of the arrondissement. The sub-prefecture carried with it the Court of First Instance and all the public servants to be found in the capital of an arrondissement. The increase in the population of Paris, by increasing the value of firewood and the quantity consumed, necessarily added to the importance of the commerce of Ville-aux-Fayes. Gaubertin had founded his new fortune on his foresight in divining the influence of the peace on the population of Paris, which actually increased by more than a third between 1815 and 1825.

The shape of Ville-aux-Fayes is sufficiently indicated by that of the ground on which it is built. The two sides of the promontory were lined with wharves. The bar to stop the logs was at the foot of the hill covered by the forest of Soulanges. Between the bar and the town there was a suburb. The lower town, situated in the broadest part of the delta, extended to the shores of the lake of the Avonne.

Above the lower town five hundred houses with gardens, built on the height that had been cleared of trees for three hundred years, surrounded the promontory on three sides, enjoying all the innumerable views afforded by the glittering surface of the lake of Avonne, covered with rafts in process of construction and with piles of logs. The brooks laden with logs from the river, and the pretty cascades of the Avonne, which, being higher than the stream into which they empty, supply water for the mill-wheels and for the sluices of some factories, form a picture replete with animation and made more attractive by

its frame of dark-green forest and by the magnificent contrast between the long valley of Aigues and the sombre heights in the foreground, which look down on Ville-aux-Fayes.

Facing that vast curtain, the royal road, which passes the stream by a bridge a fourth of a league from Ville-aux-Fayes, passes the end of an avenue of poplars where there is a small suburb grouped around the posting-station, which is connected with a large farm. The cantonal road also makes a detour to reach the bridge where it joins the high-road.

Gaubertin had built himself a house on the delta with the idea of starting a square which would make the lower town as attractive as the upper town. It was a modern affair, built of stone with an iron balcony, blinds, painted windows, and no ornamentation except fretwork under the eaves; slate roof, a single floor and attics, a fine courtyard, and an English garden in the rear, bathed by the waters of the Avonne. The magnificence of that structure compelled the sub-prefecture, which was occupying temporary quarters in a wretched hovel, to establish itself opposite, in a mansion which the department was obliged to build, upon the persistent solicitation of the deputies Leclercq and Ronquerolles. The town also built its municipal offices there. The court, which had also occupied hired quarters, had a court-house recently completed, so that Ville-aux-Fayes owed to its mayor's restless genius a line of very imposing modern buildings. The gendarmerie built itself barracks to finish out the square.

These changes, of which the natives were very proud, were due to the influence of Gaubertin, who had, within a few days, received the cross of the Legion of Honor, in anticipation of the king's approaching birthday. In a town thus constituted, and of modern creation, there is neither aristocracy nor nobility. And so the bourgeois of Ville-aux-Fayes, proud of their independence, all espoused the cause of the peasants in the quarrel that had arisen between them and a count of the Empire who had gone over to the Restoration. In their eyes the oppressors were the oppressed. The feeling in that trading town was so well known to the government, that they had sent thither as sub-prefect a man of a conciliatory turn of mind, the pupil of his uncle, the famous Des Lupeaulx, one of those men who are used to compromises, familiar with the exigencies of all governments, and whom Puritan politicians, who do worse things than they, call corrupt.

The interior of Gaubertin's house had been decorated with the tasteless inventions of modern luxury. There were rich wall-papers with gilt borders, bronze chandeliers, mahogany furniture, astral lamps, round, marble-topped tables, white china with gold stripes for dessert, chairs with red morocco seats and aquatint engravings in the dining-room, furniture upholstered in blue cassimere in the salon—everything excessively cold and uninteresting, and yet it all seemed, in the eyes of Ville-aux-Fayes, the apotheosis of Sardanapalian luxury. Madame Gaubertin played the part of a lady of fashion with great effect;

she assumed little affected airs and posed, at forty-five years of age, like a lady-mayoress sure of her position and with a court of her own.

To one who knows France, are not the houses of Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin perfect types of the village, the small town, and the sub-prefecture?

Although he was neither a man of intellect nor of talent, Gaubertin seemed to be both; he owed his keenness of insight and his malevolence to an excessive lust for gain. He desired his fortune neither for his wife, nor his two daughters, nor his son, nor himself, nor from family pride, nor on account of the consideration that wealth gives; in addition to his vengeance, for which he lived, he loved the game of money-making, like Nucingen, who, they say, is always fingering money in both pockets at once. The management of business affairs was the man's life; and, although he had a well-rounded paunch, he displayed the activity of a man with no paunch at all. Like stage servants, intrigues, tricks to be played, plots to concoct, deceptions, commercial sharp-dealing, accounts to render and receive, angry scenes, and the sowing of discord stimulated him, kept his blood in circulation, and regulated the flow of bile through his body. He went and came, on horseback, in his carriage, by water, to auction sales, to Paris, thinking of everything, holding a thousand threads in his hands and never entangling them.

Quick and decided in his movements as in his ideas, short and thick-set, with a slender nose, sharp eye, ears alert, he reminded one of a hunting-dog.

His sunburned face, round and dark, from which the tanned ears stood out in bold relief,—for he ordinarily wore a cap,—harmonized well with his character. His nose was turned up, his tightly-closed lips never opened to say a kindly word. His thick whiskers formed two shiny black bushes, beneath a pair of high-colored cheek-bones, and lost themselves in his cravat. Curly grizzled hair that lay naturally in rows like that of an old magistrate's wig, and looked as if it were shrivelled by the violence of the fire that burned inside his brown skull and gleamed in his gray eyes, which were surrounded with circular wrinkles, doubtless by the habit of winking as he looked across the fields in the bright sunlight, fittingly completed his physiognomy. He had the hairy, hooked, knobbed hands of men who work hard. His manner was agreeable to those with whom he did business, for he enveloped himself in deceptive good humor; he had the art of talking a great deal without mentioning the things that he preferred to keep quiet about; he wrote little, so that he could always deny anything that was unfavorable in what he allowed to escape him. His papers were kept by a cashier, an honest man, such as men like Gaubertin can always lay their hands upon, and of whom they make their first dupe, in their own interest.

When Rigou's little carriole appeared, about eight o'clock, in the avenue which follows the river from the posting-station, Gaubertin, in cap and jacket and boots, was already coming from the wharves; he

quickened his pace, rightly guessing that Rigou would not put himself out except for *the great affair*.

"Good-day, Father Catch-em; good-day, fat paunch, full of gall and wisdom," he said, giving each of his two visitors in turn a little tap on the belly. "We have business to do together, and we'll talk it over, glass in hand, bless my soul! that's the proper way."

"You must grow fat at that trade," said Rigou.

"I take too much trouble; I'm not, like you people, confined to my house, bewitched, like an old dotard. Ah! you're in luck, on my word! You can do business with your back to the fire and your belly to the table, sitting in an armchair,—customers come and hunt you up. But come in, come in, bless my soul! the house is yours as long as you stay in it."

A domestic in blue livery, trimmed with red braid, came and took the horse's bridle and led him into the courtyard where the offices and the stables were.

Gaubertin left his guests to walk in the garden and joined them again after taking the necessary time to give his orders for breakfast.

"Well, my little wolves," he said, rubbing his hands, "we saw the gendarmerie of Soulanges going toward Conches at daybreak; of course they're going to arrest those who have been convicted of stealing wood.—God bless my soul! this is getting warm! this is getting warm!—At this moment," he continued, looking at his watch, "the boys must be well and duly arrested."

"Probably," said Rigou.

"Well, what do they say in the village? what have they determined on?"

"Why, what is there to determine on?" asked Rigou. "We have nothing to do with it," he added, glancing at Soudry.

"What! nothing? And suppose Aigues is sold as a result of our plans, who will gain five or six thousand francs by it? Am I the only one? My loins aren't strong enough to spit up two million, with three children to start in life and a wife who won't listen to reason in the matter of expenses; I must have partners. Hasn't Father Catch-em his funds all ready? He hasn't a mortgage that isn't due, he only lends now on notes that I endorse. I go into it for eight hundred thousand francs; my son, the judge, for two hundred thousand; we rely on Catch-em for two hundred thousand; how much shall we put you down for, Father Skull-cap?"

"For the rest," said Rigou, coolly.

"*Tudieu!* I'd like to have my hand where your heart is!" said Gaubertin. "What will you do?"

"Why, I'll do as you do; tell us your plan."

"My plan," replied Gaubertin, "is to charge double price for half of it to those who want to buy in Conches, Cerneaux, and Blangy. Père Soudry will have his customers at Soulanges, and you yours here. That's not where the trouble comes; but how shall we arrange among ourselves? how shall we divide the large lots?"

"*Mon Dieu!* that's the simplest thing in the world," said Rigou. "Each one will take what suits

him best. As for myself, I won't stand in anybody's way, I'll take the woods with my son-in-law and Père Soudry; the woods have been cut into enough not to tempt you; we'll leave you your share in the balance; that's well worth your money, on my word!"

"Will you sign an agreement to that effect?" said Soudry.

"The agreement wouldn't be worth anything," replied Gaubertin. "Besides, you see that I play a fair game; I trust entirely to Rigou, he's to be the purchaser."

"That satisfies me," said Rigou.

"I make only one condition; I am to have the gate-house of the Avonne and its appurtenances and fifty acres of land about it; I'll pay you for the land. I will make the gate-house my country-house, it will be near my woods. Madame Gaubertin,—Madame Isaure, as she wants to be called—will make it her villa, she says."

"I agree," said Rigou.

"Between ourselves," said Gaubertin, in a low tone, after looking about him on all sides and making sure that no one could hear him, "do you think they're capable of striking an underhand blow?"

"Such as what?" asked Rigou, who never chose to understand anything that was only half said.

"Why, suppose the fiercest of the lot, a man with a sure hand, should send a bullet about the count's ears—just to defy him?"

"He's just the man to run after him and grab him."

"Michaud, then?"

"Michaud wouldn't talk about it, he'd lay low and watch, and end by ferreting out the man and those who put him up to it."

"You are right," rejoined Gaubertin. "Twenty or thirty of them will have to break out together; a few of them will be sent to the galleys—in fact, they'll take the riffraff that we shall want to get rid of after making use of it. You have two or three blackguards there like the Tonsards and Bonnébault—"

"Tonsard will do some rascally thing," said Soudry, "I know him—and we'll have Vaudoyer and Courtecuisse egg him on."

"I have Courtecuisse fast," said Rigou.

"And I have Vaudoyer in the hollow of my hand."

"Caution!" said Rigou, "caution before everything!"

"I say, Papa Skull-cap, you don't think, do you, that there would be any harm in talking things over as they happen? Are we the ones who complain and arrest, and steal wood and glean?—If monsieur le comte means business and forms a combination with a farmer-general to work the Aigues estate, why 'it's good-bye, baskets, the grapes are picked,' and you may lose more by it than I. What we say is between ourselves and for ourselves, for I certainly sha'n't say a word to Vaudoyer that I can't repeat before God and men. But there's no law against foreseeing what's to happen and taking advantage of it when it happens. The peasants in this canton are a very hot-headed lot of people; the general's

exactions, his severity, and the persecutions of Michaud and his understrappers, have exasperated them beyond endurance; to-day, things have come to a head, and I would be willing to bet that there'll be a row with the gendarmerie.—And now let us go to breakfast."

Madame Gaubertin joined her guests in the garden. She was a pale woman with long curls in the English fashion, falling down her cheeks, who affected the passionately virtuous style, who pretended never to have known love, who put all the functionaries to the torture on the question of platonic affection, and who had for admirer the king's attorney, her *patito*, as she called him. She was given to caps with pompons, but she preferred to wear nothing at all on her head, and overdid blue and delicate pink. She danced and affected girlish manners at forty-five, but she had huge feet and horrible hands. She wished to be called Isaure, for, with all her nonsense and disagreeable qualities, she had the good sense to consider the name of Gaubertin degrading; she had colorless eyes, and hair of an uncertain color, a sort of dirty nankeen. However, she was taken as a model by many young women who murdered the sky with their languishing glances, and played at being angels.

"Well, messieurs," she said, as she saluted them, "I have some extraordinary news for you! The gendarmes have returned."

"Did they make any prisoners?"

"Not one! The general solicited their pardon in

advance. It was granted in honor of the blessed anniversary of the king's return among us."

The three associates looked at one another.

"The fat cuirassier is sharper than I thought!" said Gaubertin. "Let's adjourn to the table, we must comfort ourselves somehow; after all, the game's not lost, it's only postponed; it's your turn to act now, Rigou."

Soudry and Rigou returned home disappointed, having failed to invent any method of bringing about a catastrophe that would result profitably to them, and trusting, as Gaubertin had bade them do, to chance. Like those Jacobins who, in the earlier days of the Revolution, were foiled by the clemency of Louis XVI., and in their rage stung the court to harsh measures in order to bring about anarchy, which to them meant fortune and power, the redoubtable adversaries of the Comte de Montcornet based their last hope on the severity to be displayed by Michaud and his keepers in putting down further depredations. Gaubertin promised his fellow-workers his assistance, but did not go into details with them, for he did not wish them to know his relations with Sibilet. There is nothing like the discretion of a man of Gaubertin's stamp, unless it be the discretion of an ex-gendarme or an unfrocked priest. Such a plot could not be carried out well, or to speak more fitly, ill, except by three men of that sort, steeped in hate and self-interest.

V

THE BLOODLESS VICTORY

Madame Michaud's fears were a result of the second-sight due to genuine passion. When the mind is filled exclusively with a single person, it comes finally to embrace the moral world that surrounds that person, and sees clearly what is taking place there. In her love, a wife feels the presentiments that assail her later in maternity.

While the poor young woman allowed herself to listen to the confused voices that came to her ear from unknown regions, a scene took place in the wine-shop of the *Grand-I-Vert*, in which her husband's existence was threatened.

The early risers in the district had seen the gendarmerie from Soulanges marching toward Conches about five o'clock in the morning. The news circulated rapidly, and they who were interested in the matter were greatly surprised to learn, from those who lived farther up the valley, that a detachment of gendarmes, commanded by the lieutenant from Ville-aux-Fayes, had passed through the forest of Aigues. As it was a Monday, there were reasons enough for the laborers to visit the wine-shop; but it

was also the eve of the anniversary of the return of the Bourbons, and although the habitués of the Tonsards' lair needed not that *august cause*—as it was then called—to justify their presence at the *Grand-l-Vert*, they did not fail to proclaim it lustily as soon as they fancied that they saw the shadow of any official whatsoever.

There were Vaudoyer, Tonsard and his family, Godain, who was in some sense a part of the family, and an old vine-dresser named Laroche. The latter was a man who lived from hand to mouth, he was one of the delinquents furnished by Blangy in the species of conscription invented to cure the general of his mania for complaints. Blangy had contributed three other men, twelve women, eight girls, and five boys, whose husbands and fathers were required to answer for them, all of them being absolutely penniless; but it is also true that they were the only ones who possessed nothing. The year 1823 had enriched the vine-dressers, and 1826 was likely, by reason of the very large vintage, to supply them even more plentifully with funds; the works carried out by the general had also added to the amount of money in circulation in the three communes which surrounded his property, and they had had some difficulty in finding a hundred and twenty paupers in Blangy, Conches, and Cerneux; in order to do it, they were obliged to take the old women, mothers, and grandmothers of those who own some property, but who had nothing of their own, like Tonsard's mother. This Laroche, the old delinquent, had absolutely nothing; his blood

was not hot and wicked, like Tonsard's: he was spurred on by a dull, cold hatred, he worked in silence, his face always wore a savage expression; work was unendurable to him, and he could not live unless he worked; his features were harsh, his expression repellent. Despite his sixty years, he did not lack strength, but his back had given way and he was bent double; he saw no hope for the future, he had no bit of land of his own, and he envied those who owned land; and so, when he was in the forest of Aigues, he was pitiless and took keen delight in doing needless destruction.

"Shall we let them carry us off?" said Laroche. "After they get through at Conches, they'll come to Blangy; this is my second offence, I'm in for three months in jail."

"What are you going to do against the gendarmes, old drunkard?" said Vaudoyer.

"Do! can't we cut their horses' legs with our scythes? They'll soon be on the ground; their muskets ain't loaded, and when they see that they're one against ten they'll have to quit. If the three villages should rise and kill two or three gendarmes, would they guillotine everybody? They'd have to knuckle down as they did in the centre of Burgundy, where a whole regiment was sent for the same kind of a row. Bah! the regiment went back; the peasants kept on going to the woods as they'd been going for years, same as here."

"If we're killing to kill," said Vaudoyer, "it would be better to kill only one; but it ought to

be done without danger, in a way to sicken all the *Arminacs* in the country."

"Which one of the brigands?" asked Laroche.

"Michaud," said Courtecuisse; "he's right, Vaudoyer is, quite right. You'll see that when a keeper's been put in the shade, they'll find it hard to get others to stand in the sun and watch. They're on hand by day, but the trouble is they're on hand at night too. They're demons, I tell you!"

"Wherever you go," said old Tonsard, the old woman of seventy, showing her parchment-like face pierced with thousands of holes and two green eyes, and embellished by locks of dingy white hair protruding from under a red handkerchief; "wherever you go, you find them and they stop you; they look at your bundle; if there was a single branch cut from a tree, a single twig of wretched hazel, they'd take the whole bundle and *report* you—report, indeed! Ah! the beggars! there's no way of catching 'em, and if they suspect you, they'll soon have your wood untied. They're three dogs as ain't worth two sous; if you should kill 'em, it wouldn't ruin France, drat 'em!" .

"Little Vatel ain't so bad," said Madame Tonsard, the daughter-in-law.

"He!" said Laroche, "he does his work like the others; tell him a good story, it's all right and he laughs with you; but you don't stand any better with him for that; he's the meanest of the three, he has no heart for the poor, just like Monsieur Michaud—"

"Monsieur Michaud has a pretty wife, all the same," said Nicolas Tonsard.

"She's in the family way," said the old woman; "but if this thing goes on, her brat will have a funny kind of a baptism when she calves."

"Oh! those *Arminacs* of Parisians!" said Marie Tonsard; "you can't laugh with them; and even if you should, they'd *report* of you all the same, without any more thought for you than if they hadn't laughed with you."

"So you've tried to get round them, have you?" said Courtecuisse.

"*Pardi!*"

"Oh, well!" said Tonsard, with a determined air, "they're like other men; there's ways of getting rid of 'em."

"Faith, no," said Marie, continuing her line of thought, "they don't laugh; I don't know what's happened to them; to be sure, that bully at the gate-house is married; but Vatel and Gaillard and Steingel ain't; they haven't a woman anywhere; indeed, there ain't a woman who'd have 'em."

"We'll wait and see how things turn out when the crops are harvested and the grapes picked," said Tonsard.

"They won't prevent the gleaning," said the old woman.

"I don't know about that," said La Tonsard. "Their Groison says this, that monsieur le maire's going to publish an order saying that no one can glean without a pauper's certificate; and who's to

give the certificate? Himself, of course! he won't give out many of 'em. He'll post up notices, too, forbidding anybody to enter the field till the last sheaf's on the wagon."

"Why, is this cuirassier the plague, then?" cried Tonsard, beside himself with rage.

"I didn't know it till yesterday," his wife replied, "when I offered Groison a little drink to see if I could get any news out of him."

"There's a lucky dog!" said Vaudoyer; "they've built him a house, they've given him a good wife, he has money in the Funds, he's dressed like a king.—I was rural guard twenty years and I got nothing by it but bad colds."

"Yes, he's lucky," said Godain; "he has property—"

"We sit here like imbeciles that we are!" cried Vaudoyer; "the least we can do is to go and see what's going on at Conches; they won't stand any more than we will."

"Come on," said Laroche, who was none too steady on his legs; "if I don't wipe out one or two of them, I wish I may lose my name."

"You!" said Tonsard; "you'd let the whole commune be carried off! but as for me, if anyone should touch the old woman, there's my gun, and it wouldn't miss its aim."

"Well," said Laroche to Vaudoyer, "if they take one man away from Conches, there'll be one gendarme less!"

"Père Laroche has said it!" cried Courtecuisse.

"He has said it," rejoined Vaudoyer, "but he hasn't done it, and he won't do it.—What good would that do, if you're bound to get yourself strung up? If you're killing to kill, it's better to kill Michaud."

During this scene, Catherine Tonsard was doing sentry duty at the wine-shop door, in order to be in a position to warn the drinkers to keep quiet if anyone passed. Despite their wavering legs, they rushed, rather than walked, from the wine-shop, and their bellicose ardor guided them toward Conches, along the road that skirted the walls of Aigues for a fourth of a league.

Conches was a genuine Burgundian village, with a single street, which continued the high-road. Some of the houses were built of brick, others of clay; but they were of wretched appearance. Coming by the departmental road from Ville-aux-Fayes, you approached the village from behind, and, under those circumstances, it did not lack effect. Between the high-road and the Ronquerolles woods, which were a continuation of the forest of Aigues, and crowned the heights, flowed a small stream, and the landscape was enlivened by a number of houses attractively grouped. The church and the parsonage formed a separate group, and could be seen from the gate of the park of Aigues which reached to that point. In front of the church was an open space surrounded by trees, where the conspirators from the *Grand-I-Vert* saw the gendarmes standing, and they thereupon quickened their hurried pace.

At that moment, three mounted men rode out through the Conches gate of the park, and the peasants recognized the general and his body-servant, with Michaud, the head-keeper, all of whom rode toward the square at a gallop. Tonsard and his customers arrived there a few moments after them. The delinquents, men and women, had made no resistance, they were all in custody of the five Soulanges gendarmes and the fifteen others from Ville-aux-Fayes. The whole village was assembled. The fathers and mothers and children of the prisoners were coming and going, bringing them what they needed to pass the time in prison. A very curious spectacle was that presented by the assemblage of country people, furiously angry but almost silent, as if their minds were made up. The women, old and young, were the only ones who were talking. The small boys and girls were perched on piles of wood and heaps of stones so as to see better.

"Those hussars of the guillotine chose their time well!—they came on a holiday—"

"Well, well! are you going to let them take your man off like that? What's going to become of you these next three months, the best months in the year, when wages are so high?"

"They're the thieves!" replied the women, glaring threateningly at the gendarmes.

"What's the matter with you, old girl, that you squint like that?" said the sergeant. "Just understand that it won't take long to settle your business, if you undertake to insult us."

"I didn't say anything," the woman hastened to reply, in a whining, humble tone.

"I heard a remark just now that I could make you repent of—"

"Come, my children, don't get excited!" said the mayor of Conches, who was also postmaster. "What the devil! these men are ordered to do something and they have to obey."

"True, it's the bourgeois of Aigues who's responsible for it all. But patience!"

At that moment, the general rode into the square, and his arrival gave rise to some murmurs which disturbed him very little; he rode straight up to the lieutenant of gendarmerie of Ville-aux-Fayes, and after exchanging a few words with him, handed him a paper; the officer thereupon turned to his men and said:

"Release your prisoners, the general has obtained their pardon from the king."

At that moment, General de Montcornet was talking with the mayor of Conches; but, after a few moments' conversation carried on in undertones, that functionary, addressing the delinquents, who had expected to sleep that night in prison and were amazed to find themselves at liberty, said to them:

"Thank monsieur le comte, my friends; you owe it to him that your sentences are remitted; he solicited your pardon in Paris and obtained it in time for the anniversary of the king's return. I hope that in the future you will act with more consideration toward a man who treats you so well, and that

you will respect his property henceforth.—*Vive le roi!*"

And the peasants shouted *Vive le roi!* enthusiastically, in order to avoid shouting *Vive le Comte de Montcornet!*

This scene had been planned as a matter of policy by the general in conjunction with the prefect and the procureur-général; for it had been thought desirable, while exhibiting a purpose to act with decision in order to stimulate the local authorities and make an impression on the rural mind, to deal mildly with the offenders, the questions involved seemed to be such delicate ones. Indeed, resistance, in case there had been resistance, would have caused the government serious embarrassment. As Laroche had said, they could not guillotine a whole commune.

The general had invited the mayor of Conches to breakfast, with the lieutenant of gendarmes and the sergeant. The conspirators from Blangy remained in the Conches wine-shop, where the liberated delinquents expended in drink the money they were carrying with them to pay their expenses in prison, and the men from Blangy were naturally of the *wedding-party*—that is the term applied by countryfolk to rejoicings of all sorts. To drink, quarrel, fight, eat, and return home drunk and ill, is "to celebrate the wedding."

Having left the park by the Conches gate, the count took his three guests through the forest in order to show them the marks of the spoliations

and enable them to judge of the importance of the question.

As Rigou was returning to Blangy, about noon, the count and countess, Emile Blondet, the lieutenant of gendarmes, the sergeant, and the mayor of Conches were finishing breakfast in the magnificent and showy dining-room where Bouret's ideas of splendor had left their marks, and which was described by Blondet in his letter to Nathan.

"It would be a great pity to abandon such a place of residence," said the lieutenant of gendarmes, who had never been at Aigues, to whom everything had been shown, and who, eyeing them through a glass of champagne, had noticed the admirable animation of the naked nymphs who upheld the arch of the ceiling.

"Therefore we will defend ourselves here to the death," said Blondet.

"My reason for saying that," added the lieutenant, glancing at his sergeant as if to impose silence upon him, "is that the general's enemies are not all in the country—"

The good lieutenant was touched by the splendor of the breakfast, by the superb service, by the imperial luxury which replaced the luxury of the opera-singer, and Blondet had uttered divers clever remarks which stimulated him no less than the toasts he had honored like a true knight.

"How can I have enemies?" said the general, in amazement.

"He is so kind-hearted!" added the countess.

"He parted on ill terms with our mayor, Monsieur Gaubertin, and if he wants to be left at peace, he ought to be reconciled to him."

"To him!" cried the count, "why, don't you know that he's my old steward, a scoundrel?"

"He's not a scoundrel now," rejoined the lieutenant, "he's mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"He's a bright man, is our lieutenant," said Blondet; "it's very evident that a mayor is necessarily an honest man."

The lieutenant, realizing from the count's remark that it was a hopeless task to try to enlighten him, pursued the conversation no further in that direction.

VI

THE FOREST AND THE HARVEST

The scene at Conches had produced a good effect, and the count's faithful keepers were on the alert to see that only dead-wood was taken from the Aigues woods; but those woods had been so thoroughly worked by the natives for the past twenty years that there was nothing left but living wood, which they busied themselves in killing, in anticipation of the winter, by very simple processes which could not be discovered until long after. Tonsard sent his mother into the forest; the keeper saw her go in; he knew where she would come out, and watched for her in order to inspect her bundle; he found it made up of dry sticks, fallen branches, broken, withered twigs; and she groaned and complained of having to go a long distance at her age to pick up such wretched stuff. But what she did not tell him was that she had been into the densest thickets, that she had removed the moss about the stem of a young tree and had taken off the bark in a circle just where it emerged from the ground; then she had replaced the moss and dead leaves as they were before. It was impossible to detect that circular incision not made

with a knife, but torn so as to resemble the work of those destructive, gnawing creatures which are called, according to the locality, *thons*, Turks, or white worms, and which are the earliest stage of the cockchafer. This worm is fond of the bark of trees; it burrows between the bark and the sapwood, and eats as it goes. If the tree is large enough for the worm, before it has gone all the way around, to have passed into its second stage,—that of larva, in which it remains until its second resurrection,—the tree is saved; for so long as a single spot in the sapwood is covered with bark, the tree will grow. To understand how close the connection is between entomology and agriculture, horticulture, and all the products of the soil, it is enough to know that the great naturalists, like Latreille, Comte Dejean, Klugg of Berlin, Gené of Turin, etc., have discovered that the vast majority of known insects exist at the expense of vegetation; that the coleoptera, a catalogue of which has been published by Monsieur Dejean, number twenty-seven thousand species; and that, notwithstanding the most persistent investigations of the entomologists of all countries, there is an immense number of species of which the triple transformations, which are the distinguishing characteristics of all insects, are not known; and lastly, that not only has every plant its own special insect, but that every terrestrial product, however it may be changed in form by human industry, has its own. Thus flax and hemp, after having served to clothe, or it may be to hang men, after travelling about on the backs of an army, become

writing-paper, and all those who write or read a great deal are familiar with the habits of an insect called the *paper-louse*, whose swift motion and general conduct are truly marvellous; it passes through unknown transformations in a ream of carefully guarded white paper, and you see it running and jumping in its superb coat, gleaming like spar or talc; it is the little bleak-fish with wings.

The Turk is the despair of the landowner; it escapes, by burrowing, the government circular, which can decree another Sicilian Vespers only when it has become a cockchafer; and if the country people knew with what disasters they are threatened in case they do not exterminate the cockchafers and caterpillars, they would pay a little more heed to the injunctions of the prefecture.

Holland came near being wiped off the face of the earth; its dikes were eaten by teredos, and science has no knowledge of the future insect state of the teredo, even as it has no knowledge of the anterior metamorphoses of the cochineal. The ergot of rye is probably a multitude of insects in which the genius of science has as yet discovered only a very slight motion.

Thus, while awaiting harvest-time and the gleaning, fifty or more old women imitated the work of the white worm at the feet of five or six hundred trees, which were certain to be dead bodies in the spring and to put forth no leaves; and they were selected in the most inaccessible spots so that the surrounding branches would seem to belong to them. Who

had told them the secret? No one. Courtecuisse had complained, in Tonsard's wine-shop, of having found an elm *growing pale* in his garden; that elm was beginning to suffer from a disease, and he suspected the Turk; for he knew all about Turks, did Courtecuisse, and when a Turk attacked the foot of a tree, the tree was lost. And he described the Turk's labors to his audience at the wine-shop by imitating them. The old women went at the work of destruction with the mystery and dexterity of fairies, and they were stimulated by the hateful measures taken by the mayor of Blangy, which the mayors of the adjacent communes were ordered to take. The rural guards posted a proclamation to the effect that no one would be allowed to glean in grain field or vineyard without a pauper's certificate issued by the mayor of his commune, the model therefor being sent by the prefect to the sub-prefect and by him to each mayor. The great landowners in the department greatly admired the behavior of the Comte de Montcornet, and the prefect said in his salon that if the leaders of society, instead of remaining in Paris, would come and live on their estates and act together, they might end by reaching some desirable result; for such measures, the prefect added, ought to be taken everywhere, to be adopted with unanimity and modified by benefactions and by such enlightened philanthropy as was exhibited by General de Montcornet.

The general and his wife, assisted by Abbé Brossette, did, in fact, make an attempt at philanthropic

work. They had reasoned the matter out; they proposed to prove, by incontestable results, to the people who were stealing from them, that they would be the gainers by confining themselves thenceforth to legitimate work. They gave them flax to spin and paid for the spinning; then the countess had the thread woven into cloth, to make towels, aprons, and coarse napkins for the kitchen, and shirts for the poor. The count undertook improvements which required workmen, and employed none but men from the neighboring communes. Sibilet was entrusted with these details, while Abbé Brossette directed the countess to those who were really needy and often brought them to her. Madame de Montcornet held her assizes of benevolence in the large reception-room which opened on the stoop. It was a beautiful room with a floor of red and white marble tiles, furnished with long settees covered with red velvet, and containing also a handsome porcelain stove.

To that room the old woman Tonsard, one morning just before the harvest, brought her granddaughter, who had, she said, a confession to make that bore heavily on the honor of a poor but honest family. While she was speaking, Catherine stood in the attitude of a culprit; she then, in her turn, described the *embarrassment* in which she found herself, and which she had confided to no one but her grandmother; her mother would turn her out-of-doors; her father, who was a man of honor, would kill her. If she had a thousand francs only, a poor laboring man named Godain, who knew everything,

and loved her like a brother, would marry her; he would buy a poor bit of ground somewhere and build himself a hut on it. It was very touching. The countess promised to devote to that marriage a sum that she might have spent to gratify some passing whim. Michaud's happy marriage and Groison's encouraged her to do it. And then the wedding-feast and the marriage would set a good example to the country people and stimulate them to good behavior. So the union of Catherine Tonsard and Godain was negotiated by means of the thousand francs promised by the countess.

Another time, a horrible old hag, Mère Bonnébault, who lived in a wretched hovel between the Conches Gate and the village, brought a load of great skeins of thread.

"Madame la comtesse has done wonders," said the abbé, full of hope for the moral progress of the savages. "That woman caused a great deal of damage in your woods; but how can she and why should she go there to-day? She spins from morning till night, her time is occupied, and her work pays her well."

The country was quiet; Groison made satisfactory reports, the offences seemed on the point of ceasing, and it may be that the condition of the region and of its inhabitants would, in fact, have taken on a completely different aspect, had it not been for the rancorous greed of Gaubertin, the bourgeois cabals of the first society of Soulanges, and the hate of Rigou, who fanned the hatred and crime in the hearts of

the peasants of the valley of Aigues as if they were the smouldering fire of a forge.

The keepers still complained of finding many branches cut with reaping-hooks among the underbrush, the evident purpose being to prepare wood for the winter, and they were on the watch for the culprits but had been unable to catch them. The count, with Groison's assistance, had issued pauper's certificates only to the thirty or forty real paupers in the commune; but the mayors of the neighboring communes had been less strict. The count's determination to be severe in the matter of gleaning, which had degenerated into mere thieving, was the more unyielding in view of his clemency in the affair of Conches. He paid no attention to his three leased farms; only those farms were involved which were let to farmers for half their product, and of those he had six, each of about two hundred acres. He had given notice that everyone was forbidden, under pain of prosecution and such fines as the justice of the peace should inflict, to enter the fields before the sheaves were taken away; his orders, however, concerned no property but his own in the commune. Rigou knew the country; he had let his arable fields, in small lots, and on short leases, to people who knew how to carry away their crops; he took his pay in grain. The gleaning did not injure him. The other landowners were peasants, and they did not prey upon one another.

The count had ordered Sibilet to arrange with his farmers to cut the crops on the different farms one

after the other, sending all the reapers to each farm instead of scattering them, which prevented proper oversight. He went himself, with Michaud, to see how matters were going on. Groison, who had suggested that measure, was to be present whenever one of the wealthy landowner's fields was taken possession of by the paupers. They who dwell in towns would never imagine what the gleaning is to the country people; their passion for it is inexplicable, for there are women who lay aside work that is handsomely paid to go and glean. The grain they procure in that way seems better to them; there is a tremendous attraction to them in the supplies thus obtained which go to make up the most substantial part of their sustenance. Mothers carry their young children, their sons and daughters; the most infirm old men drag themselves to the fields, and of course those who have means feign poverty. They put on rags for the gleaning.

The count and Michaud were present, on horseback, at the first entrance of that ragged mob into the first fields of the first farm. It was ten o'clock of a hot morning in August, the sky was cloudless and blue as a periwinkle; the earth was burning hot, the grain seemed to shoot flames, the reapers worked away, their faces baked by the reflection of the sun's rays on the hard, resonant ground, all silent, their shirts wringing wet, drinking water from round stone pitchers, shaped like loaves of bread, with two handles and a rough spout with a nozzle of willow wood.

At one end of the fields that had been reaped,

where the carts stood on which the sheaves were piled, there were a hundred or more creatures who certainly left far in the rear the most hideous conceptions that the brushes of Murillo or Teniers, the boldest artists in that line, or the figures of Callot, that poet of the fantastic aspects of misery, ever realized; their bronzed legs, their shaven heads, their torn and ragged clothes, their coloring, so curiously expressive of degradation, their rents with the edges moist with grease, their patches, their stains, the discoloration of the cloth, the threadbare spots,—in a word, their ideal of the material side of poverty was surpassed, just as the avaricious, anxious, stupid, idiotic, savage expressions on the faces had, over the immortal compositions of those princes of coloring, the never-failing advantage of nature over art. There were old women with necks like a turkey's, with red eyes without lashes, who held their heads like a dog pointing at a partridge, children silent as soldiers under arms, little girls who pawed the ground like cattle waiting for their food. The characteristics of childhood and of old age were repressed by ferocious greed: the greed for another's property which became theirs by abuse of privileges. Every eye was glowing, every gesture threatening; but all kept silent in presence of the count, his head-keeper, and the rural guard. The great landowners, the farmers, the workingmen, and the paupers were all represented there; the social question was clearly defined, for hunger had called together those unattractive figures. The sun brought out all the harsh

features and the hollow cheeks; it scorched the bare, dust-begrimed feet; there were children without shirts, hardly covered by torn blouses, their curly, light hair full of straw and hay and twigs; some women were leading little tots just able to walk, whom they would let roll about in the furrows.

This gloomy picture was heart-rending to an old soldier with a kind heart.

"I can't bear to look at this," said the general to Michaud. "One must realize the importance of such measures in order to persist in them."

"If every landowner followed your example, lived on his estate and did the good you do on yours, my general, I won't say there'd be no more poor people, for there always will be some, but there'd be no one who couldn't live by his work."

"The mayors of Conches, Cerneux, and Soulanges have sent us their paupers," said Groison, who had been verifying the certificates; "that shouldn't be."

"No, but our paupers will go to those communes," said the count; "it's enough for this time to prevent their taking the sheaves bodily, we must go step by step," he said as he rode away.

"Did you hear him?" said Mère Tonsard to Mère Bonnébault, for the count's last words were spoken in a louder tone than the others, and reached the ear of one of the two old women who were stationed on the road that skirted the field.

"Yes! this ain't all: a tooth to-day, an ear to-morrow; if they could find a sauce for our pluck,

they'd eat the Christian's just as they do a calf's!" said old Bonnébault, who exhibited her threatening profile to the count as he passed, but in a twinkling imparted a hypocritical expression to it by a fawning glance and a nauseous grin; at the same time she hastened to make a low reverence.

"So you are gleaning, too, although my wife helps you to earn so much?"

"Oh! you see, my dear monsieur, God give you good health! my boy throws it all away, and I'm obliged to hide a little wheat so as to have bread in winter. I pick up a bit still—that helps!"

The gleanage profited the gleaners but little. Feeling that they were sustained, the farmers saw that their crops were carefully raked up, they looked after the making of the sheaves themselves and the loading, so that at all events there was by no means the same amount of abuse and pillage as in former years.

Being accustomed to find a considerable amount of wheat among their gleanings and finding none this time, the false paupers as well as the genuine ones, who had forgotten the pardon at Conches, felt a sort of sullen discontent, which was envenomed by the Tonsards, by Courtecuisse, by Bonnébault, Laroche, Vaudoyer, Godain, and their adherents in the sessions at the wine-shop. It was still worse after the grape-picking, for the *hallebotage* did not begin until the vines had been stripped and examined by Sibilet with extraordinary strictness. This performance exasperated the peasants to the last degree; but when

there is so great an interval between the class that becomes wroth and rises in revolt, and the class that is threatened, words amount to nothing; we discover what is taking place only by acts, and the malcontents work underground, like moles.

The fair at Soulanges passed off without incident, with the exception of some petty squabbles between the first and second society of the town, caused by the restless despotism of the queen, who would not submit to the empire which the fair Euphémie Plissoud had founded and firmly established in the heart of the brilliant Lupin, whose fugitive fancy she seemed to have enchained forever.

The count and countess did not appear at the fair nor at the *Tivoli* ball, and their failure so to do was imputed to them as a crime by the Soudrys, the Gaubertins, and their partisans; "it was arrogance, it was disdain," was what people said at Madame Soudry's. Meanwhile, the countess was trying to fill the void caused by Emile's absence with the boundless interest that kindly souls feel in the good that they do or think that they do; and the count, for his part, devoted himself no less zealously to material improvements in the management of his estate, which were also destined, in his view, to affect favorably the position, and, consequently, the disposition, of the people of the neighborhood. Assisted by the advice and experience of Abbé Brossette, Madame de Montcornet gradually acquired an accurate statistical knowledge of the poor families of the commune, their respective conditions, their

needs, their means of existence, and the judicious method of assisting them in their work without making them lazy and indolent. The countess had placed Geneviève Niseron, La Péchina, in a convent at Auxerre, on the pretext of having her learn enough about dressmaking to be able to take her into her own service, but really to put her out of reach of the infamous attacks of Nicolas Tonsard, whom Rigou had succeeded in having exempted from military service; the countess thought, too, that a religious education, and the seclusion and close oversight of the cloister, might eventually subdue the ardent passions of that precocious child, whose Montenegrin blood seemed to her at times like a threatening torrent of flame, preparing in the distance to destroy the domestic happiness of her faithful Olympe Michaud.

And so there was peace at the château of Aigues. The count, lulled to sleep by Sibilet and encouraged by Michaud, congratulated himself on his firmness, and thanked his wife for having contributed, by her benevolence, to the precious result, their tranquillity. The question of the sale of the wood the general reserved to be solved at Paris, by coming to an understanding with some of the dealers. He had no idea of the way in which the trade was carried on, and he was entirely ignorant of Gaubertin's influence all along the course of the Yonne, which supplied Paris with the larger part of its wood.

VII

THE GREYHOUND

Toward the middle of September, Emile Blondet, who had gone to Paris to publish a book, returned to Aigues for relaxation, and to meditate upon his plans of work for the winter. At Aigues the affectionate and sincere young man of the first days that succeed adolescence reappeared once more in the blasé journalist.

"What a beautiful soul!"

That was the remark of the count and countess concerning him.

Men accustomed to wallow in the abysses of social nature, to understand everything, to keep back nothing, make an oasis for themselves in the heart; they forget their own backslidings and those of other people; they become little saints in a narrow and select circle; they have a feminine delicacy of feeling and abandon themselves to a momentary realization of their ideal; they are angelic to a single person who adores them and they do not play a part; they wear the heart on the sleeve, so to speak; they feel the need of brushing off the spots of mud, of curing their sores, of having their wounds

dressed. At Aigues, Emile Blondet seemed to be venomless and almost without wit; he did not make an epigram, he was as gentle as a lamb, his affability was truly platonic.

"He's such an attractive young man, that I miss him when he's not here," said the general. "I wish he might make a fortune and give up the life he is leading in Paris."

Never had the magnificent landscape and the park at Aigues been more sumptuously beautiful. In the early days of autumn, when the earth, weary of bringing forth, relieved of the burden of her products, exhales delicious vegetable odors, the woods are especially lovely; they begin to take on those tints of brownish green, the warm coloring of Sienna earth, which make up the lovely tapestries beneath which they hide as if to defy the winter's cold.

Nature, after exhibiting itself in spring in sprightly, joyous mood, like a brunette who hopes, becomes as mild and melancholy as a blonde who remembers; the green swards are tinged with gold, the autumn flowers show their pale petals, the marguerites put forth their yellow eyes less frequently above the lawns, we can see only the purplish calyxes. Yellow hues abound, the shady spots become smaller as the leaves fall, but deeper in tone; the sun, already shining more obliquely, sends its orange-hued, furtive rays athwart the shadows, long lines of light which vanish swiftly as the trailing robes of women who say adieu.

On the morning of the second day after his arrival,

Emile sat at the window of his chamber, which looked upon a terrace with a modern balcony from which a fine view was to be had. This balcony extended along the countess's apartments on the side of the château which faced toward the forests and fields of Blangy. The pond, which would have been called a lake had Aigues been nearer to Paris, was partly in sight, as was its long canal; the stream from the gate-house near the bridge crossed a patch of green sward, a ribbon of gleaming, sparkling water.

Beyond the park, against the background of villages and wall, could be seen the tilled fields of Blangy, some meadows in which cows were feeding, small estates surrounded by hedges, with their fruit-trees, walnuts and apples; and, like a frame, the heights on which the noble trees of the forest arose in tiers.

The countess had come out in slippers to look at the flowers on her balcony, which were pouring forth their morning perfumes; she wore a fine linen *peignoir*, through which you could catch a glimpse of her lovely pink shoulders; a dainty cap rested saucily on her hair, which protruded frolicsomely beneath it; her tiny feet gleamed through her transparent stockings, her *peignoir* was unconfined by a belt and afforded a glimpse of an embroidered linen petticoat insecurely attached to her corsets, which also could be seen when the wind opened the gauzy *peignoir*.

"Ah! are you there?" she said.

"Yes."

"What are you looking at?"

"A sensible question! you tore me away from the

contemplation of nature.—I say, countess, do you care to take a walk through the woods this morning, before breakfast?"

"What an idea! You know that I have a perfect horror of walking."

"We will walk but very little; I will drive you in the tilbury and we will take Joseph to hold the horse. You never set foot in your forest, and I have noticed a very strange phenomenon there; in different places there are groups of tree-tops of the color of Florentine bronze, the leaves having withered."

"Very well, I will go and dress."

"Then we shall not get started for two hours! Take a shawl and put on a hat and shoes—that's all you need. I'll go and have the horse harnessed."

"I always have to do what you want. I will return in a moment."

"We are going to drive, general; will you come?" said Blondet, waking his host, who grunted as a man does when partly aroused from his morning nap.

A quarter of an hour later the tilbury was rolling slowly along the avenues of the park, followed at a distance by a tall servant in livery.

It was a fine September morning. The deep blue of the sky appeared in places amid the mottled clouds which were apparently the real background, the ether seeming to be the accident; there were long lines of ultramarine along the horizon, but in layers, alternating with other clouds like banks of sand; the color-tones changed to green above the forests. The earth, beneath that covering, was as warm as a

woman when she leaves her bed, it exhaled sweet and warm but uncultivated odors. The odor of the cultivated land was blended with that of the forest. The *Angelus* was ringing at Blangy, and the notes of the bell, mingling with the strange concert of the woods, gave harmony to the silence. Here and there white, transparent vapors floated upward. The beauty of the morning had suggested to Olympe that she should accompany her husband, who had to go and give an order to one of the keepers whose house was not far away; the physician at Soulanges had advised her to walk, but not enough to tire her; she dreaded the heat of mid-day, and did not choose to walk at night. So Michaud took his wife with him, and was followed by that one of his dogs of which he was most fond, a pretty mouse-colored greyhound with white spots, fond of good living like all greyhounds, and full of faults like any animal who knows that his master is fond of him.

So it was that, when the tilbury stopped at the gate of the former hunting-box, the countess, upon inquiring as to Madame Michaud's health, learned that she had gone into the forest with her husband.

"This weather is an inspiration to everybody," said Blondet, turning his horse into one of the six paths, at random.

"By the way, Joseph, do you know the woods?"

"Yes, monsieur."

And they rode away! The avenue was one of the most beautiful in the forest. Soon it turned and narrowed, becoming a winding path, upon which

the sun shone through rents in the roof of foliage which covered it like an arbor-top, and to which the breeze wafted the perfume of wild thyme, lavender, and mint, of the withered twigs and the leaves that sigh as they fall; the dew-drops lay on the grass, and the leaves fell in showers as the light carriage passed, and, as it rolled on, its inmates caught glimpses of the mysterious fantasies of the woods: the cool hollows where the verdure is damp and dark, where the light takes on a velvety softness as it dies; the clearings surrounded by graceful birches, overtopped by a centenary oak, the Hercules of the forest; the magnificent groups of gnarled trunks, gray and moss-covered, with deep furrows in the bark, as if smeared with a gigantic crayon; and the border of fine grass, of slender flowers, which grow on the edges of the wheel ruts. The brooks sang. Certainly, it is delightful beyond words to drive with a woman who, as you pass up and down the slippery roads, where the ground is carpeted with moss, pretends to be afraid or really is, and clings to you, so that you feel the pressure, involuntary or intentional, of her cool, soft arm and the weight of her plump, white shoulder, and who smiles if you tell her that she interferes with your driving. The horse seems to be in the secret of these interruptions, he looks to right and left.

The spectacle, new to the countess, of that nature so powerful in its effects, so unfamiliar and so grand, caused her to fall into languorous meditation; she leaned back in the tilbury and abandoned herself to the pleasure of being beside Emile; her eyes were

occupied, her heart spoke, and she answered that interior voice in harmony with her own; he, too, cast sidelong glances at her and enjoyed that dreamy meditation, during which the ribbons of her hood became untied and delivered the silky curls of her fair hair to the morning wind with charming unconcern. As they drove along at random, they came to a locked gate to which they had no key; they called Joseph: he had no key.

"Well, let us walk. Joseph will look out for the tilbury, we can easily find him again."

Emile and the countess plunged into the forest, and arrived at a small clearing, such as one often comes upon in the woods. Twenty years before, charcoal-burners had built their kilns there and the trees had never grown again; everything was burned for a considerable distance around. In twenty years, nature had succeeded in laying out there a flower-garden of its own, just as an artist gives himself the pleasure once in a lifetime of painting a picture for himself. The lovely spot was surrounded by fine trees, whose tops fell in gigantic fringes; they formed an immense canopy above the couch on which the goddess reposed. The charcoal-burners went for their water by a narrow path to a deep hole, a pool always full, where the water was pure and sweet. The path still existed, it lured you on by its graceful windings and suddenly it came to an end, confronting you with a steep bank from which innumerable roots hung downward, forming a sort of tapestried canvas. This unknown pond was bordered by a tract of flat,

close-cropped turf; there were a few poplars there, and willows cast their shadows on the bench of turf which some meditative or indolent charcoal-burner had constructed there. The frogs made themselves at home, the teal bathed in the pool, the water-fowl came and went, a hare started up, you were undisputed master of that charming bath, decorated with superb living bulrushes. Over your head the trees assumed diverse attitudes: here were trunks descending in the shape of boa-constrictors; there, beeches straight as Greek columns. Snails and slugs crawled about in peace. A tench put out his nose, a squirrel peered at you. And when Emile and the countess, being tired of walking, seated themselves on the ground, some bird began to sing a song of autumn, a farewell song, to which all the birds listened, one of those songs that we welcome with an outburst of love, and listen to with all the organs at once.

"How silent it is!" said the countess, deeply moved and in a low voice, as if not to disturb the peaceful scene.

They looked at the green spots on the water, little worlds filled with busy life; they pointed to the lizard playing in the sun and flying at their approach—conduct by which he has earned the name of friend of man. "He proves by that how well he knows him!" said Emile. They looked at the frogs, who were more trustful and came to the surface, squatting on beds of watercress and winking their carbuncle eyes. The sweet, simple poesy of nature found its way into those two hearts, wearied by the artificialities of

society, and filled them with contemplative emotion. Suddenly, Blondet started; leaning toward the countess, he whispered:

"Do you hear?"

"What?"

"A strange noise."

"That's like a literary man who sits in an office all day and knows nothing about the country; it's a woodpecker making his hole. I'll wager that you don't even know the most curious feature in the bird's character; as soon as he has given one blow with his beak,—and he has to give thousands of them to make a hole in an oak twice as large round as your body,—he goes to the other side to see if he has pierced the tree, and keeps going there over and over again."

"That noise, my dear instructress in natural history, is made by no animal; there is an indefinable note of intelligence about it that tells me it is made by man."

The countess was seized with a panic; she ran across the flowery carpet, retracing her steps, and insisted upon leaving the forest.

"What's the matter?" cried Blondet, anxiously, running after her.

"I thought I could see eyes glaring at me," she said, when she had reached the path by which they had come to the charcoal kiln.

At that moment they heard the dull groaning of a creature whose throat is suddenly cut, and the countess, whose fright redoubled, ran so fast that Blondet

could hardly keep up with her. She ran, she ran like a will-o'-the-wisp; she did not hear Emile shouting after her: "You are mistaken!"—She ran on and on, Blondet followed close behind, and they continued to run for some distance. At last they were stopped by Michaud and his wife, who were coming toward them, arm-in-arm. Emile was panting, and the countess entirely out of breath; so that it was some time before they could speak and explain their behavior. Michaud joined Blondet in laughing at the countess's fears, and he and his wife went with the two wanderers to show them the way back to the tilbury. When they reached the gate, Madame Michaud called:

"Prince!"

"Prince! Prince!" shouted the keeper.

And he whistled again and again; no greyhound.

Emile spoke of the strange noises which opened the incident.

"My wife heard those noises," said Michaud, "and I laughed at her."

"Somebody has killed Prince!" cried the countess, "I am sure of it now, and they killed him by cutting his throat at a single blow, for what I heard was the last groan of a dying creature."

"The devil!" said Michaud, "the thing is worth the trouble of investigating."

Emile and the keeper left the two ladies with Joseph and the horses, and returned to the natural flower-garden, on the site of the old charcoal kiln. They went down to the pool; they searched the

underbrush and found no sign. Blondet was the first to retrace his steps; he saw in one of the clumps of trees on the upper level one of the trees whose leaves had turned; he pointed it out to Michaud and expressed a desire to go to see it! They both started in a straight line through the forest, turning aside for the impenetrable thickets of briers and holly, and found the tree.

"It's a fine elm!" said Michaud, "but a worm, you see, a worm has made the circuit of the bark at the foot of the tree."

He stooped, took a piece of the bark, and held it up.

"Just see what work that is!"

"There are a great many worms in your forest!" said Blondet.

At that moment, Michaud spied a red spot a few steps away, and a little farther on, the head of his greyhound. He heaved a sigh.

"The villains! Madame was right."

He and Blondet examined the body, and found that, as the countess had thought, they had cut Prince's throat, having first, to prevent him from barking, enticed him with a bit of half-salted pork which he still held between his tongue and his palate.

"Poor beast, death came to him where he sinned!"

"Just as it does to all princes," rejoined Blondet.

"There was someone here who has just gone away, not wishing to be surprised by us," said Michaud, "and who, consequently, must have committed a serious offence: but I see no branches or trees cut."

He and Blondet began a careful search, scrutinizing the spot on which they proposed to set a foot before placing it there. After a few steps, Blondet pointed to a tree at whose foot the grass was crushed and trodden, and there were two perceptible holes.

"Someone has been kneeling there, and it was a woman; for a man's legs wouldn't crush the grass so all around the holes made by the knees; there's the shape of the skirt."

The keeper, after examining the foot of the tree, found the beginning of a hole in the bark, but did not find the hard, scaly, shiny worm, marked with brown specks, with an appendage that already begins to resemble that of the cockchafer, whose head and antennæ it has and the two strong hooks with which it cuts the roots.

"I understand now, my dear fellow, the great number of *dead* trees I noticed this morning from the terrace of the château, which led me to come here to ascertain the cause of the phenomenon. The worms are active, but they are no other than your peasants, who do not stay in the woods."

The keeper uttered an oath and hurried away, followed by Blondet, to where they had left the countess, and begged her to take his wife home with her. He took Joseph's horse, leaving him to return on foot, and rode rapidly away to intercept the woman who had killed his dog and surprise her with the bloody reaping-hook and the tool for making incisions in the trees. Blondet sat between

the countess and Madame Michaud, and told them of Prince's death and the lamentable discovery to which it had led.

"*Mon Dieu!* let us tell the general before he has his breakfast!" cried the countess; "if we don't, he may die of anger."

"I will prepare him," said Blondet.

"They killed the dog!" said Olympe, wiping away her tears.

"You must have been very fond of the greyhound, my dear, to weep so for him?" said the countess.

"I think of Prince's death only as an ominous presage; I am in fear and trembling that something will happen to my husband!"

"How thoroughly they have spoiled our morning!" said the countess, with a lovely little pout.

"How they are spoiling the country!" said the young woman, sadly.

They found the general at the gate.

"Where have you come from?" he asked.

"I will tell you in a moment," said Blondet, mysteriously, giving his hand to Madame Michaud, whose depression attracted the count's notice.

A moment later the two men were on the terrace in front of the countess's apartments.

"You have laid in a sufficient stock of moral courage, you won't fly into a rage, will you?"

"No," said the general, "but go on, or I shall think you mean to laugh at me."

"Do you see those trees with dead leaves?"

"Yes."

"Do you see those that are dying?"

"Yes."

"Well, every dead tree means a tree killed by the peasants whom you think you have won over by your benefactions."

And Blondet narrated the adventures of the morning.

The general turned so pale that the journalist was frightened.

"Come, swear, curse, lose your head!—your self-restraint may do you more harm than anger would."

"I am going to smoke!" said the count, and he went off to the summer-house.

During breakfast Michaud returned; he had been unable to find anyone. Sibilet, whom the count had sent for, also came.

"Do you, Monsieur Sibilet, and you, Monsieur Michaud, let it be known with due circumspection, throughout the neighborhood, that I will give a thousand francs to the person who will enable me to catch red-handed the rascals who are killing my trees in this way. We must find out what tools they use and where they buy them; I have a plan."

"Those fellows never sell one another out," said Sibilet, "when premeditated crimes are committed by which they profit; for it is impossible to deny that this devilish scheme has been carefully planned and thought out—"

"Yes, but a thousand francs to them means an acre or two of land."

"We will try," said Sibilet; "at fifteen hundred,

I will undertake to find a traitor, especially if his secret is kept."

"But act as if none of us knew anything about it, myself most of all; it would be better that it should appear that you discovered it without my knowledge; otherwise, we should be the victims of some scheme; we must be more suspicious of these brigands than of an enemy in war time."

"Why, they are enemies!" said Blondet.

Sibilet cast a sidelong glance at him, like a man who understood the bearing of the remark, and went out.

"I don't like your Sibilet," said Blondet, when he had heard him leave the house, "he's a false man."

"Thus far, there's nothing to be said against him," replied the general.

Blondet retired to write letters. He had lost the heedless gayety of his first visit, he was restless and preoccupied; he had no presentiments as Madame Michaud had; his feeling was rather one of suspense, awaiting disasters that were certain to happen. He said to himself:

"All this will end badly; and, if the general doesn't take some decided course and does not abandon a battle-field where he is crushed by numbers, there will be many victims; who knows, indeed, if he and his wife will come out of it safe and sound. Great God! the idea of exposing that adorable, devoted, perfect creature to such danger!—And he believes that he loves her!—Well, I will share their dangers, and, if I cannot save them, I will die with them."

VIII

RUSTIC VIRTUES

At night, Marie Tonsard was sitting on the edge of a culvert on the Soulanges road awaiting Bonnébault, who had passed the day at the café, according to his custom. She heard him in the distance, and his step indicated that he was drunk, and his silence that he had lost, for he sang when he had won.

"Is it you, Bonnébault?"

"Yes, little one."

"What's the matter?"

"I owe twenty-five francs, and my neck could be wrung twenty-five times before I get them to pay."

"Well, we can get five hundred," she whispered in his ear.

"Oh! that means killing somebody; but I want to live—"

"Hush! Vaudoyer will give 'em to us if you'll let him catch your mother at work on a tree."

"I'd rather kill a man than sell my mother. You have your own grandmother; why not let him catch her?"

"If I tried it, my father'd get mad and prevent our little game."

"True.—All the same, my mother sha'n't go to jail. Poor old woman! she bakes my bread and finds clothes for me, I don't know how.—Go to jail!—and by my doing! I shouldn't have any heart or bowels to do it! no, no. And for fear that she may get sold, I'm going to tell her to-night not to cut any more trees."

"Well, then, my father can do as he pleases; I'll tell him there's five hundred francs to be got, and he can ask my grandmother if she's willing. You see they'll never put a woman of seventy in jail. And even if they should, she'd be better off there than in her garret."

"Five hundred francs! I'll speak to mother about it," said Bonnébault. "After all, if it can be arranged so that I get the money, I'll let her have some of it to live on in jail; she can spin and enjoy herself, and she'll be well fed and well housed; she won't have so much care as she has at Conches. I'll see you to-morrow, little one—I haven't the time to talk with you to-night."

The next morning, at five o'clock, just as day was breaking, Bonnébault and his mother knocked at the door of the *Grand-I-Vert*, where old Mère Tonsard alone was out of bed.

"Marie," cried Bonnébault, "it's all fixed!"

"Do you mean what you and she were talking about yesterday, about the trees?" said old Mère Tonsard. "It's all arranged, and I'm going to do it."

"The deuce you are! my boy has the promise of an acre of land from Monsieur Rigou for the money."

The two old women quarrelled as to which of them should be sold by her son. The family was aroused by the noise. Tonsard and Bonnébault took sides with their respective parents.

"Draw lots," said Madame Tonsard, the daughter-in-law.

Chance decided in favor of the wine-shop.

Three days later, at daybreak, the gendarmes escorted old Mère Tonsard, in custody, from the forest of Ville-aux-Fayes, she having been caught *in flagrante delicto* by the head-keeper and his assistants and the rural guard, with a wretched file, used to tear the tree, and a tool with which the circular gash was polished as the insect polishes its path. The complaint stated that this dastardly operation had been performed on sixty trees within a radius of five hundred yards. The old Tonsard woman was transferred to Auxerre; the case was within the jurisdiction of the Assize Court.

When Michaud discovered the old woman at the foot of the tree, he could not help saying:

"This is the kind of people monsieur le comte and madame la comtesse waste their kindness on!—On my word, if madame would take my advice, she wouldn't give any dowry to that Tonsard girl, for she's even worse than her grandmother."

The old woman looked up at Michaud with her gray eyes and darted a venomous glance at him. The count did, in fact, when he learned who was the author of the crime, forbid his wife to give Catherine Tonsard anything.

"Monsieur le comte is well advised to take that step," said Sibilet, "for I have found out that Godain bought the field three days before Catherine spoke to madame. So those two must have anticipated the effect of that little scene and of madame's compassion. Catherine is quite capable of having voluntarily got into the condition she is in so as to have an excuse for asking for the money, for Godain's of no account in the affair."

"What creatures!" said Blondet; "the scoundrels in Paris are saints—"

"Ah! monsieur," Sibilet interrupted him, "self-interest leads to horrible crimes everywhere. Do you know who betrayed the old Tonsard woman?"

"No!"

"Her granddaughter Marie; she was jealous about her sister's marriage and anxious to make her own arrangements."

"It is perfectly frightful!" said the count; "why, they would commit murder, wouldn't they?"

"Oh! for a trifle," Sibilet replied; "they care so little for life, these people! they're tired of working all the time. Ah! monsieur, things are no better in the heart of the country districts than in Paris, but you won't believe it."

"Do, pray, be kind and benevolent!" said the countess.

On the evening after the arrest, Bonnébault came to the *Grand-I-Vert*, where he found the whole family in great jubilation.

"Yes, yes, you'd better rejoice! I have just

learned from Vaudoyer that the countess, to punish you, retracts her promise of a thousand francs to Godain; her husband won't let her give them."

"It's that sneak Michaud who advised him," said Tonsard; "mother heard him and told me at Ville-aux-Fayes, where I went to carry her some money and all her belongings. All right, let her keep her money; our five hundred francs will help Godain pay for the land, and we'll have our revenge, Godain, both of us.—Ah! Michaud sticks his nose into our business, does he? it'll do him more harm than good. What is it to him, I'd like to know? does it happen in his woods? And yet he's the author of all this how-d'ye-do—as true as it was him who found the clue the day mother stopped his dog's whistle. Suppose I should meddle in affairs at the château! suppose I should tell the general that his wife goes to walk in the woods in the morning with a young man, and ain't afraid of the dew; she must have warm feet to do that—"

"The general, the general!" said Courtecuisse; "we could do whatever we chose with him; but Michaud's the one that stirs him up—a trouble-maker, who don't know anything about his business.—In my time things went differently."

"Oh! those were good times for us all," said Tonsard,—"eh, Vaudoyer?"

"It's a fact," said the person addressed, "that if Michaud wasn't here, we should be left in peace."

"Enough said," said Tonsard, "we'll talk of this later in the fields by moonlight."

Toward the end of October the countess went to Paris and left the general at Aigues; he was not to join her for some little time; she did not wish to lose the first performance at the Théâtre-Italien; moreover, she was alone and bored, having no longer the company of Emile, who helped her to while away the hours when the general was riding about the country and attending to his business.

November was a genuine winter month, gray and gloomy, with alternations of freezing and thawing, rain and snow. The case of old Mère Tonsard had required the presence of witnesses, and Michaud had gone to testify. Monsieur Rigou had been moved to pity for the old woman; he hired a lawyer for her, who bore heavily, in his argument, on the fact that the only testimony was from interested parties and in the absence of all witnesses for the defence; but the testimony of Michaud and his keeper, corroborated by that of the rural guard and two of the gendarmes, decided the question: Tonsard's mother was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and the lawyer said to Tonsard:

"You have Michaud's testimony to thank for that."

IX

THE CATASTROPHE

One Saturday evening, Courtecuisse, Bonnébault, Godain, Tonsard, his wife and daughters, Père Fourchon, Vaudoyer, and several workingmen were at supper in the wine-shop; the moon was shining dimly and there was one of the hard frosts that make the earth dry; the first snow had melted; so a man's feet would leave in the fields none of those traces which often result in affording valuable clues in serious cases. They were eating a stew made of hares taken in a snare; they were drinking and laughing; it was the day following Godain's wedding, and the bride was to be escorted to her new home. The house was not far from Courtecuisse's. When Rigou sold an acre of land, it was always isolated and near the woods. Courtecuisse and Vaudoyer had their guns to escort the bride. The whole neighborhood was asleep, not a light could be seen. Only this wedding-party was still awake, and it was making the greatest possible amount of noise. Suddenly old Mère Bonnébault entered: everyone looked at her.

"The woman," she whispered to Tonsard and her son, "must be going to lie in. He's just had his horse saddled and gone to Soulanges for Doctor Gourdon."

"Sit down, mother," said Tonsard, who gave her his place at the table and went and lay on a bench.

At that moment they heard a horse galloping rapidly along the road. Tonsard, Courtecuisse, and Vaudoyer went out at once and saw Michaud riding through the village.

"How shrewd he is!" said Courtecuisse; "he came down by the terrace and is going by Blangy and the high-road; that's the safest way."

"Yes; but he'll bring Monsieur Gourdon back with him," said Tonsard.

"Perhaps he won't find him," said Courtecuisse; "they were expecting him at Conches to see the postmaster's wife, who turns the whole village out at this time of night."

"But then he'll take the main road from Soulanges to Conches, and that's the shortest."

"And the safest for us," said Courtecuisse; "it's bright moonlight just now; there aren't any keepers on the main road as there are in the woods, and you can hear a long way off; and from the lodges down there, behind the hedge, just where it joins the little wood, you can fire at a man from behind, at five hundred paces, as you would at a rabbit."

"It will be half-past eleven when he passes," said Tonsard; "it'll take him half an hour to go to Soulanges and the same to come back to that spot.

But, suppose Monsieur Gourdon was on the road, boys—"

"Don't you worry," said Courtecuisse; "I'll be within ten minutes of you, on the road to the right of Blangy toward Soulanges; Vaudoyer'll be within ten minutes of you toward Conches; and, if anyone's coming, post-chaise, mail-coach, gendarmes, anybody, we'll fire a shot in the ground, a muffled shot."

"And suppose I miss him?"

"He's right," said Courtecuisse.—"I'm a better shot than you; Vaudoyer, I'll go with you. Bonnébault will take my place; he'll give a shout; that can be heard better and it's less suspicious."

All three returned to the house, and the wedding festivities continued; but about eleven o'clock, Vaudoyer, Courtecuisse, Tonsard, and Bonnébault went out with their guns, no notice being taken of their departure by the women. They returned three-quarters of an hour later, and went on drinking until one in the morning. The two daughters of Tonsard, their mother, and old Bonnébault had so plied with liquor the miller, the workmen, and the two peasants, as well as Fourchon, that they lay on the ground snoring when the four men went out, and when they returned someone woke the sleepers, who were lying in the same place.

While this debauch was in progress, the Michaud household was in mortal anxiety. Olympe had had false pains, and her husband, thinking that she was about to be confined, had set off instantly in hot

haste to fetch the doctor. But the poor woman's pains passed away as soon as Michaud had gone, for her mind was so filled with thoughts of the peril that might lie in wait for her husband at that late hour in a hostile neighborhood overrun with determined scoundrels, that her mental agony was sufficient to deaden and overcome momentarily her physical suffering. In vain did her maid tell her again and again that her fears were imaginary—she seemed not to understand her, and remained in her bedroom by the fire, listening intently to every sound outside; and in her terror, which increased from moment to moment, she aroused the man-servant with the purpose of giving him an order which she did not give. The poor little woman paced the room with feverish excitement; she went to the windows and looked out, and opened them notwithstanding the cold; she went down and opened the door into the courtyard, looked out, and listened.

"Nothing—still nothing!" she said.

And she went upstairs again in despair.

At about a quarter past twelve, she cried:

"Here he is, I hear his horse!"

She ran downstairs, followed by the servant, who set about opening the gate.

"It's very strange," she said, "he is coming home by the road through the woods from Conches."

Then she stood still, as if horror-stricken, motionless, and voiceless. The servant shared her alarm, for there was in the horse's wild gallop, in the clashing

of the empty stirrups, an indefinable suggestion of disaster, accompanied as they were by the significant neighs that a horse utters when he is alone. Soon, too soon for the unhappy wife, the horse reached the gate, gasping, drenched with sweat, but alone; he had broken the reins in which he had doubtless become entangled. With a haggard expression, Olympe watched the servant open the gate; she saw the horse, and, without a word, ran off toward the château like a mad woman; she arrived there at last, and fell on the ground under the general's windows, crying:

"Monsieur, they have murdered him!"

It was such a terrible cry that it woke the count; he rang, but the whole household was on foot, and the groans of Madame Michaud, who was delivered of a dead child as she lay on the ground, attracted the attention of the general and his servants. They raised the unhappy dying woman, and she expired, saying to the general:

"They have murdered him!"

"Joseph," the count cried to his valet, "run and find the doctor! Perhaps there may still be some hope.—No, rather ask monsieur le curé to come, for the poor woman is quite dead, and her child too.—My God! my God! how fortunate that my wife is not here!—Do you," he said to the gardener, "go and find out what has happened."

"This is what has happened," said the servant from the gate-house: "Monsieur Michaud's horse returned without him, with his reins broken and his

legs covered with blood.—There's a spot of blood on the saddle."

"What can we do at night?" said the count. "Go and wake Groison, find the keepers, saddle the horses, and we'll beat up the country."

At daybreak, eight persons, the count, Groison, the three keepers, and two gendarmes who had come from Soulanges with the sergeant, were searching the country. They finally found, about noon, the head-keeper's body in a thicket between the main road and the road from Ville-aux-Fayes, at the end of Aigues park, five hundred paces from the Conches gate.

One gendarme started for Ville-aux-Fayes, to summon the king's attorney, another for Soulanges to summon the justice of the peace. Meanwhile, the general, assisted by the sergeant, drew up a report. They found on the road traces of the pawing of a horse that had reared, opposite the second lodge, and the well-defined footprints of a frightened horse galloping, as far as the first path into the woods below the hedge. The horse, having no guide, had taken that course; Michaud's hat was found in the path. The horse had taken the shortest road back to his stable. Michaud had a bullet in his back; the spinal cord was broken.

Groison and the sergeant studied with noteworthy sagacity the ground about the traces of pawing, which indicated, in legal parlance, "the theatre of the crime," and were unable to discover any clue. The ground was frozen too hard to retain the

impression of the foot of the man who had killed Michaud; they found only the wadding of a cartridge. When the king's attorney, the examining magistrate, and Monsieur Gourdon came to take the body away and make an autopsy, it was discovered that the bullet, which corresponded with the remains of the wad, was a bullet belonging to a military musket, fired from a military musket, and there was not a single weapon of that description in the commune of Blangy. The examining magistrate and Monsieur Soudry, the king's attorney, at the château that evening, advised collecting all the facts they could and waiting. That was also the advice of the sergeant and of the lieutenant of gendarmes from Ville-aux-Fayes.

"There's no question but that this was a scheme hatched by the people hereabout," said the sergeant; "but there are two communes, Blangy and Conches, and there are five or six men in each capable of having fired the shot. The one I'm most suspicious of, Tonsard, passed the night carousing; but your deputy, general, was of the party! Langlumé, your miller, didn't leave them. They were so drunk they couldn't stand; they escorted the bride home about half-past one, and the arrival of the horse shows that Michaud was killed between eleven o'clock and midnight. At a quarter past ten, Groison saw the whole party at table, and Michaud passed there on his way to Soulanges, where he arrived at eleven o'clock. His horse reared between the two lodges on the road; but he may have received the

shot before he got to Blangy and have sat up in the saddle some time. We must issue summonses for twenty persons at least and arrest everyone we suspect; but these gentlemen know the peasants as well as I do; you might keep them in prison a whole year and you'd get nothing but denials out of them. What do you expect to do with all the people who were at Tonsard's?"

They sent for Langlumé, the general's miller and deputy mayor, and he described his evening. They were all in the wine-shop; they had not left it except to go into the yard for a few moments.—He had gone there with Tonsard about eleven o'clock; they had talked about the moon and the weather; they had heard nothing. He named all the guests; not one of them had left the wine-shop. About two o'clock they had all escorted the newly-married couple to their home.

The general agreed, with the approval of the sergeant, the lieutenant of gendarmes, and the king's attorney, to send down from Paris a clever agent of the detective police, who was to come to the château as a laborer, and behave so badly there as to be dismissed. He would become a regular customer of the *Grand-I-Vert*, would drink freely there, and remain in the country, notoriously disaffected toward the general. That was the best plan to follow in order to keep watch for any indiscretion and seize it on the wing.

"If I have to spend twenty thousand francs, I'll find the murderer of my poor Michaud!" General de Montcornet was never weary of repeating.

He set out with that idea and returned from Paris in January with one of the craftiest acolytes of the chief of the secret police, who was installed at the château to direct certain interior improvements, it was said, and who indulged in poaching; the general discharged him and returned to Paris in February.

X

THE TRIUMPH OF THE VANQUISHED

In the month of May, when the fine weather had begun and the Parisians had arrived at Aigues, one evening, Monsieur de Troisville, whom his daughter had brought with her, Blondet, Abbé Brossette, the general, and the sub-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes, who was visiting at the château, were playing whist and chess in the salon; it was half-past eleven. Joseph came and told his master that the discharged workman wished to speak to him; he claimed that the general had not paid him in full. He was, said the valet, very drunk.

"Very well, I will go and see him."

And the general went out on the lawn some distance from the house.

"Monsieur le comte," said the police agent, "I can never get anything out of these people; all I have discovered is that, if you remain in the neighborhood and continue to insist upon the natives abandoning the habits Mademoiselle Laguerre allowed them to form, they'll take a shot at you, too. At all events, I can do nothing more here, they're more suspicious of me than they are of your keepers."

The count paid the spy, who returned to Paris, his departure justifying the suspicions of those who were privy to Michaud's death. When the general joined his family and guests in the salon, there were on his face traces of such lively and profound emotion that his wife, in great anxiety, went to him to ask what he had learned.

"My dear love, I did not want to frighten you, and yet it is best that you should know that Michaud's death is an indirect notice to us to leave the province."

"For my part, I wouldn't leave," said Monsieur de Troisville. "I have had these difficulties in Normandie, although in another form, and I persisted; now everything is going on all right."

"Monsieur le marquis," said the sub-prefect, "Normandie and Bourgogne are two very different places. The fruit of the vine makes the blood hotter than that of the apple-tree. We are not so well acquainted with the laws and procedure, and we are surrounded by forests; manufacturing has not yet gained a foothold among us—we are savages. If I were to advise monsieur le comte, my advice would be to sell his estate and invest the proceeds in the Funds; he will double his income and won't have the slightest anxiety; if he likes the country, he can have a château in the outskirts of Paris, with a park surrounded by walls, as fine as the park at Aigues, which no one can enter, and with farms let to men who will come in cabriolets to pay their rent in bank-notes, and he will have no occasion to

call upon us for a single prosecution in a year. He can go back and forth in three or four hours.—And we shall not be without the company of Monsieur Blondet and monsieur le marquis so often, madame la comtesse."

"I, retreat before a parcel of peasants, when I did not retreat on the Danube?"

"True, but where are your cuirassiers?" said Blondet.

"Such a beautiful estate!"

"You can get more than two millions for it to-day!"

"The château alone must have cost that," said Monsieur de Troisville.

"One of the finest properties within a radius of twenty leagues!" said the sub-prefect; "but you will find finer ones in the environs of Paris."

"What is the income of two millions?" inquired the countess.

"About eighty thousand francs to-day," Blondet replied.

"Aigues doesn't bring in thirty thousand francs in gross," said the countess; "and these last years you have laid out immense sums, you have surrounded the woods with ditches."

"You can obtain a royal château in the outskirts of Paris for four hundred thousand francs to-day," said Blondet. "People are buying other people's follies."

"I thought that you were fond of Aigues," the count said to his wife.

"Do you not think that I care a thousand times more for your life?" said she. "Besides, since my poor Olympe's death and the murder of Michaud, the country has become hateful to me; all the faces I meet seem to me armed with a sinister or threatening expression."

The next evening, in Monsieur Gaubertin's salon at Ville-aux-Fayes, the sub-prefect was greeted by this question from the mayor:

"Well, Monsieur des Lupeaulx, you come from Aigues?"

"Yes," replied the sub-prefect, with a triumphant air, bestowing a tender glance on Mademoiselle Elisa; "I'm very much afraid we shall lose the general; he is going to sell his estate."

"Monsieur Gaubertin, remember my gate-house, pray. I cannot endure the noise and dust of Ville-aux-Fayes any longer; like a poor, caged bird, I sigh at a distance for the air of the fields and woods," said Madame Isaure, in her languorous voice, her eyes half-closed, letting her head drop on her left shoulder and nonchalantly twisting her long, blond ringlets.

"Pray, be prudent, madame," said Gaubertin, in an undertone; "I shall not buy the gate-house with your indiscretions."

Then he turned to the sub-prefect.

"Are they still unable to discover the authors of the keeper's murder?" he asked.

"It would seem so," was the reply.

"That will injure the sale of Aigues very seriously," said Gaubertin, loud enough for everyone

to hear; "for my part, I know I would not purchase it. The people hereabout are too bad altogether; even in Mademoiselle Laguerre's time I had trouble with them, and yet God knows how she let them have their own way."

Up to the end of May, nothing occurred to indicate that the general intended to offer Aigues for sale; he was undecided. One evening, about ten o'clock, he was returning from the forest by one of the six paths leading to the gate-house, and had dismissed his keeper as he was quite near the château. At a turn in the path, a man armed with a musket stepped out of a clump of bushes.

"General," he said, "this is the third time that you've been at the end of my gun-barrel, and the third time that I've spared your life."

"Why should you want to kill me, Bonnébault?" rejoined the general, without the slightest trace of excitement.

"Faith, if I didn't do it, somebody else would; and, you see, I love the men who served the Emperor, so I can't make up my mind to shoot you like a partridge. Don't ask any questions, I can't tell you anything. But you have enemies a thousand times more powerful and more cunning than you are and they'll end by crushing you. If I kill you, I shall get a thousand crowns and marry Marie Tonsard. Give me a few paltry acres of land and a wretched barrack to live in. I'll go on saying what I've said so far, that I haven't had a chance at you. You'll have time to sell your estate and clear out; but make

haste. I'm a good fellow still, thorough rascal as I am; another might do you more harm—"

"And if I give you what you ask, will you tell me who promised you the three thousand francs?" the general asked.

"I don't know; and I am too fond of the person who's driving me on to do this to tell you her name. And then, even if you knew it was Marie Tonsard, it wouldn't help you much; Marie Tonsard will be dumb as a wall, and I'll deny that I told you."

"Come to see me to-morrow," said the general.

"That's enough," said Bonnébault; "if they conclude that I'm not smart enough, I'll let you know."

A week after that curious conversation, the whole arrondissement, the whole department, and Paris itself were plastered over with huge posters announcing the sale of Aigues in lots, at the office of Maître Corbineau, notary, at Soulanges. All the lots were knocked down to Rigou, and the sum total of the sale was two million one hundred and fifty thousand francs. The next day, Rigou made the necessary transfers: Monsieur Gaubertin had the woods, and Rigou and the Soudrys had the vineyards and the other lots. The château and park were resold to the *black band*,* except the gate-house and its appurtenances, which Monsieur Gaubertin reserved for himself, to do homage therewith to his poetic and sentimental better half.

* The name of *black bands*—*bandes noires*—was given to companies of speculators who purchased great estates to divide them, and old monuments to demolish them and sell the materials.

Many years after these events, during the winter of 1837, one of the most remarkable political writers of the period, Emile Blondet, reached the last degree of destitution, having previously concealed his condition beneath the external appearances of a life of splendor and fashion. He was hesitating about resorting to some desperate step, for he saw that his labors, his mind, his learning, his knowledge of affairs, had led him to nothing except to work like a machine for the benefit of others, and that all the places were filled; he felt that he was on the verge of middle life, without position or fortune, and he saw that bourgeois fools and idiots were replacing the courtiers and incapables of the Restoration and that the government was being reconstituted as it was before 1830. One evening, when he was very near suicide, which he had so mercilessly lashed with his satire, and as he cast one last glance upon his deplorable existence, slandered and overburdened by hard labor much more than by the debauchery that was laid at his door, he seemed to see a noble, lovely woman's face, as we sometimes see a statue that has remained whole and unsullied amid the most melancholy ruins,—at this moment, his concierge handed him a letter with a black seal, wherein the Comtesse de Montcornet informed him of the death of the general, who had returned to the service and was in command of a division. She was his heir; she had no children. The letter, although dignified in tone, indicated to Blondet that the woman of forty, whom he had loved in his younger days,

intended to offer him a fraternal hand and a considerable fortune.

A few days ago the marriage of the Comtesse de Montcornet and Monsieur Blondet, now a prefect, took place. On his way to his prefecture he passed the place where Aigues used to be, and ordered the carriage to stop at the spot where the two lodges once stood, intending to visit the commune of Blangy, so replete with pleasant memories for the two travellers. The neighborhood was unrecognizable. The mysterious woods, the avenues through the park, all had been levelled and cleared; the country resembled a tailor's card of samples. The peasant had taken possession of the estate like a victor and conqueror. It was already divided into more than a thousand lots, and the population between Conches and Blangy had increased threefold. The turning over to agricultural uses of the lovely park, formerly so well-cared for and so charming, had isolated Michaud's gate-house, which had become the villa *Il Buen-Retiro* of Madame Isaure Gaubertin; it was the only building left standing, and dominated the whole landscape, or, to speak more accurately, the collection of small cultivated fields that had replaced the landscape. The structure resembled a château, the little cottages built all about it were such miserable affairs as peasants build.

"And this is progress!" cried Emile. "It is a page from Jean-Jacques's *Contrat Social!* And I am harnessed to the social machine that produces this result! *Mon Dieu!* what will become of kings

in a short time? indeed, with affairs in this state, what will become of the nations themselves fifty years hence?"

"You love me, you are by my side—to me the present is very beautiful, and I worry little concerning a future so far away as that," his wife replied.

"Long life to the present, by your side!" said the amorous Blondet, gayly, "and the deuce take the future!"

He motioned to the coachman to drive on, and while the horses started away at a gallop, the newly-married pair resumed the course of their honeymoon.

1845.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The public should believe the author of *The Peasants* sufficiently acquainted with the history of his time to know that there were no cuirassiers in the Garde Impériale. He takes the liberty to observe here that he has in his study the uniforms of the Republic, the Empire, and the Restoration, a collection of all the military costumes of the countries France had for allies or adversaries, and more works upon the wars of 1792 to 1815 than any marshal of France possesses. He avails himself of the opportunity afforded by the newspaper to thank those persons who have done him the honor to take sufficient interest in his works to send him amendatory notes and information.

Once for all, he states here that those inaccuracies were deliberate and intentional. This is not a SCENE OF MILITARY LIFE, where he would be bound not to put sabretasches on foot-soldiers. To touch upon contemporaneous history, even if it be only by types, is a dangerous thing. By using, in works of fiction, a framework of which the details are scrupulously true, by giving a different aspect to facts by the use of colors that do not belong to them, such are the methods of avoiding the trifling misfortune of *personalities*. Heretofore, in relation to *A Mysterious Affair*, although the main fact was changed in its details and belongs to history, the author has been compelled to reply to absurd remarks based upon the objection that there was only *one* senator kidnapped, sequestrated, during the reign of the Emperor. I should say so! perhaps they would have bestowed a wreath of flowers on the man who had kidnapped a second.

If the inaccuracy touching the cuirassiers is too offensive, it would be a simple matter not to mention the Guard. But in that case, the family of the illustrious general who commanded the cavalry that was forced back upon the Danube would call us to account for the eleven hundred thousand francs which the Emperor allowed Montcornet to take away from Pomerania.

Soon we shall be asked to tell in what geography Ville-aux-Fayes, Avonne, and Soulanges can be found. All those places, as well as the cuirassiers, live upon the immense gulf on whose shores are the Castle of Ravenswood, Saint-Ronan's Well, the estate of Tillietudlem, Gandercleugh, Lilliput, the Abbey of Thélème, Hoffmann's privy councillors, Robinson Crusoe's island, and the estates of the Shandy family; in a world exempt from taxes, where postage is paid by those who travel there, at the rate of twenty centimes per volume.

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